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AXEL'S CASTLE

A STUDY IN THE IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE
OF 1870-1930

By
EDMUND WILSON

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK

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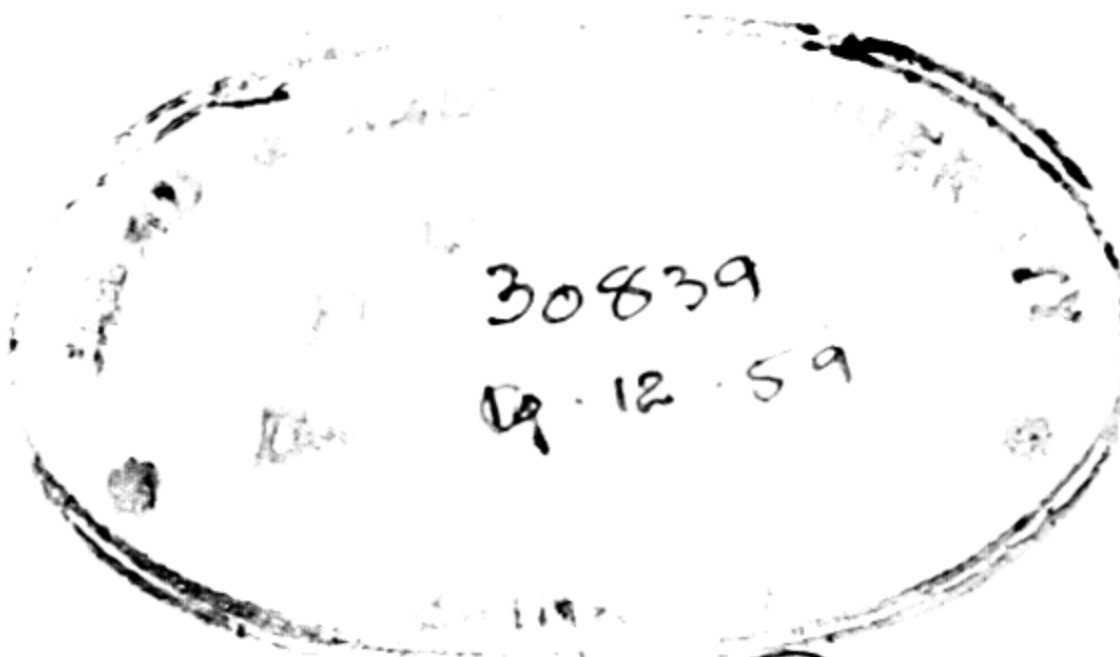
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Dear Christian Gauss:

You will see how these essays have grown out of your lectures of fifteen years ago. But it is not merely on that account that I have felt I owe you a debt in connection with them. It was principally from you that I acquired then my idea of what literary criticism ought to be—a history of man's ideas and imaginings in the setting of the conditions which have shaped them. And though this book is only a very limited and a very incomplete attempt at that sort of history, I have wanted to dedicate it to you in acknowledgment of the kindness and instruction which, beginning when I was at college, have continued ever since, and as a tribute to a master of criticism who has taught much in insisting little.

Yours as ever,

Edmund Wilson.

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SYMBOLISM

IT is my purpose in this book to try to trace the origins of certain tendencies in contemporary literature and to show their development in the work of six contemporary writers. To persons already familiar with the field, my explanations in this first chapter will seem rudimentary; but I believe that it is still true in general, for reasons which I shall suggest, that the sources and fundamental principles of many of the books which have excited most discussion during the period since the War are singularly little understood. It is not usually recognized that writers such as W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust and Paul Valéry represent the culmination of a self-conscious and very important literary movement; and even when we have become aware that these writers have something in common, that they belong to a common school, we are likely to be rather vague as to what its distinguishing features are.

We do, however, to-day as a rule have a pretty clear idea of the issues which were raised by the Romantic Movement of the beginning of the nineteenth century. We still debate Classicism and Romanticism, and when we attempt to deal with contemporary literary problems, we often tend to discuss them in those terms. Yet the movement of which in our own day we are witnessing the mature development is not merely a degeneration or

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an elaboration of Romanticism, but rather a counterpart to it, a second flood of the same tide. And even the metaphor of a tide is misleading: what we have to-day is an entirely distinct movement, which has arisen from different conditions and must be dealt with in different terms.

Romanticism, as everyone has heard, was a revolt of the individual. The "Classicism" against which it was a reaction meant, in the domain of politics and morals, a preoccupation with society as a whole; and, in art, an ideal of objectivity. In "Le Misanthrope," in "Bérénice," in "The Way of the World," in "Gulliver's Travels," the artist is out of the picture: he would consider it artistic bad taste to identify his hero with himself and to glorify himself with his hero, or to intrude between the reader and the story and give vent to his personal emotions. But in "René," in "Rolla," in "Childe Harold," in "The Prelude," the writer is either his own hero, or unmistakably identified with his hero, and the personality and emotions of the writer are presented as the principal subject of interest. Racine, Molière, Congreve and Swift ask us to be interested in what they have made; but Chateaubriand, Musset, Byron and Wordsworth ask us to be interested in themselves. And they ask us to be interested in themselves by virtue of the intrinsic value of the individual: they vindicate the rights of the individual against the claims of society as a whole—against government, morals, conventions, academy or church. The Romantic is nearly always a rebel.


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In this connection, it is illuminating to consider the explanation of the Romantic Movement given by A. N. Whitehead in his "Science and the Modern World." The Romantic Movement, Whitehead says, was really a reaction against scientific ideas, or rather against the mechanistic ideas to which certain scientific discoveries gave rise. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were in Europe the great period of the development of mathematical and physical theory; and in the literature of the so-called Classical period, Descartes and Newton were influences as important as those of the classics themselves. The poets, like the astronomers and mathematicians, had come to regard the universe as a machine, obeying logical laws and susceptible of reasonable explanation: God figured merely as the clockmaker who must have existed to make the clock. People applied this conception also to society, which, from the point of view of Louis XIV and of the American Constitution alike, had the character of a planetary system or a well-regulated machine; and they examined human nature dispassionately, in the same lucid and reasonable spirit, to find the principles on which it worked. Thus the theorems of the physicist were matched by the geometrical plays of Racine and the balanced couplets of Pope.

But this conception of a fixed mechanical order came eventually to be felt as a constraint: it excluded too much of life—or rather, the description it supplied did not correspond to actual experience. The Romantics had become acutely conscious of aspects of their experience which

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it was impossible to analyze or explain on the theory of a world run by clockwork. The universe was not a machine, after all, but something more mysterious and less rational.



“The atoms of Democritus,
And Newton's particles of light
Are sands upon the Red Sea shore,
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright!”

Blake had already contradicted contemptuously the physical theory of the eighteenth century. And to Wordsworth, the countryside of his boyhood meant neither agriculture nor neo-classic idylls, but a light never seen on land or sea. When the poet looked into his own soul, he beheld something which did not seem to him reducible to a set of principles of human nature such, for example, as La Rochefoucauld's "Maxims": he saw fantasy, conflict, confusion. And he either set himself, like Wordsworth and Blake, to affirm the superior truth of this vision as compared to the mechanical universe of the physicists; or, accepting this mechanical universe, like Byron or Alfred de Vigny, as external to and indifferent to man, he pitted against it, in defiance, his own turbulent insubordinate soul.

In any case, it is always, as in Wordsworth, the individual sensibility, or, as in Byron, the individual will, with which the Romantic poet is preoccupied; and he has invented a new language for the expression of its mystery, its conflict and confusion. The arena of literature has been

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transferred from the universe conceived as a machine, from society conceived as an organization, to the individual soul.

What has really taken place, says Whitehead, is a philosophical revolution. The scientists of the seventeenth century who presented the universe as a mechanism had caused people to draw the conclusion that man was something apart from nature, something introduced into the universe from outside and remaining alien to all that he found. But a Romantic poet like Wordsworth has come to feel the falsity of this assumption: he has perceived that the world is an organism, that nature includes planets, mountains, vegetation and people alike, that what we are and what we see, what we hear, what we feel and what we smell, are inextricably related, that all are involved in the same great entity. Those who make fun of the Romantics are mistaken in supposing that there is no intimate connection between the landscape and the poet's emotions. There is no real dualism, says Whitehead, between external lakes and hills, on the one hand, and personal feelings, on the other: human feelings and inanimate objects are interdependent and developing together in some fashion of which our traditional notions of laws of cause and effect, of dualities of mind and matter or of body and soul, can give us no true idea. The Romantic poet, then, with his turbid or opalescent language, his sympathies and passions which cause him to seem to merge with his surroundings, is the prophet of a new insight into nature: he is describing things as they really are; and a revolution

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in the imagery of poetry is in reality a revolution in metaphysics.

Whitehead drops the story at this point; but he has provided the key to what follows. In the middle of the nineteenth century, science made new advances, and mechanistic ideas were brought back into fashion again. But they came this time from a different quarter—not from physics and mathematics, but from biology. It was the effect of the theory of Evolution to reduce man from the heroic stature to which the Romantics had tried to exalt him, to the semblance of a helpless animal, again very small in the universe and at the mercy of the forces about him. Humanity was the accidental product of heredity and environment, and capable of being explained in terms of these. This doctrine in literature was called Naturalism, and it was put into practice by novelists like Zola, who believed that composing a novel was like performing a laboratory experiment: you had only to supply your characters with a specific environment and heredity and then watch their automatic reactions; and by historians and critics like Taine, who asserted that virtue and vice were as much the products of automatic processes as alkalis and acids, and who attempted to account for masterpieces by studying the geographical and climatic conditions of the countries in which they had been produced.

Not, however, that the movement known as Naturalism arose directly from "The Origin of Species." There had already set in, about the middle of the century, quite independent of the theory of Evolution, a reaction against

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the sentimentality and the looseness of Romanticism, and in the direction of the objectivity and the severity of Classicism again; and this reaction had already been characterized by a kind of scientific observation which closely corresponded to that of biological science. This reaction is seen most clearly in France. The Parnassian group of poets, who made their first appearance in the fifties—Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Hérédia—seemed to have taken it for their aim merely to picture historical incidents and natural phenomena as objectively and accurately as possible in impassive perfect verse. Leconte de Lisle's elephants crossing the desert is a celebrated example: the elephants appear and disappear with a certain classical dignity and grandeur, and the poet leaves it at that.

It is less easy, in English poetry, to give clear examples of the reaction toward Naturalism: the English did not, after the Romantic Movement, take much interest in literary methods till toward the end of the nineteenth century. But the tendency toward what we call realism had set in, none the less: Browning, though he had, of course, nothing of the classical form of the Parnassians, was addicted to historical reconstruction of a kind more pedantic and less flamboyant than that of the true Romantics, and when he dealt with contemporary life, did so at least as realistically as any of the Victorian novelists—themselves going in Zola's direction without quite being aware of the fact. And we can see very plainly in Tennyson, who was much preoccupied with the doctrines of Evolution, something of the same exactitude of description combined with

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something of the same severity of verse—though with less hardness and more grace—that we find in the French poets.

“Nor wilt thou snare him in the white ravine,
Nor find him dropt upon the firths of ice,
That huddling slant in furrow-cloven fells
To roll the torrent out of dusky doors:
But follow; let the torrent dance thee down
To find him in the valley; let the wild
Lean-headed eagles yelp alone.”

And it is interesting to compare Tennyson, in this connection, with Pope on the rare occasions (though not so rare as people sometimes suppose) when he is describing natural objects:

“The silver eel, in shining volumes roll’d,
The yellow carp, in scales bedropp’d with gold.”

These lines have the technical perfection and the precise observation of Tennyson, but they are heavier and more metallic. Pope is often, as a matter of fact, very close to the French Parnassians. The latter represent, in reality, a second classical-scientific movement, the counterpart to that represented by Pope.

But the highest developments of Naturalism took place, not in poetry, but in prose. The plays of Ibsen and the novels of Flaubert are the masterpieces of this second period of modern classicism, as Racine and Swift are of the first. The art of Flaubert and Ibsen is again, like the art of the seventeenth-century writers, scrupulously non-

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personal and objective, and it insists upon precision of language and economy of form. Compare the lucidity, the logic and the limited number of characters of such a tragedy of Ibsen's as "Rosmersholm" with the rigorous conventions of Racine; or compare "Gulliver's Travels" with "Bouvard et Pécuchet" or "L'Education Sentimentale." Yet, though the earlier works resemble the later ones in many obvious ways, they differ from them in this: where a seventeenth-century moralist like La Rochefoucauld would have sought to discover and set forth the universal principles of human behavior, a nineteenth-century writer like Ibsen or Flaubert has begun to study man in relation to his particular environment and time. The method of approach in both cases, however, may be described as "scientific," and it tends to lead us to mechanistic conclusions.

Now Flaubert and Ibsen both had been suckled on Romanticism. Flaubert had begun by writing a Romantic "Saint-Antoine" before he chastened it and cut it down to the more sober one which he published; and Ibsen had written in verse his Faustian "Brand" and "Peer Gynt" before he arrived at his realistic plays in prose. Each, beginning in Romanticism, had evolved for himself a new discipline and developed a new point of view. For "Madame Bovary" is not merely arranged and written differently from a novel by Victor Hugo: it also constitutes an objective criticism of a case of Romantic personality; and Ibsen was occupied all his life with situations produced by the conflict of the essentially Romantic conception of one's

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duty to one's own personality with the conception of one's duty to society.

But in the later prose plays of Ibsen, the trolls and ghosts of his early dramatic poems have begun to creep back into the bourgeois drawing-rooms: the Naturalist has been finally compelled to make cracks in his own mold. All that vaporous, confused and grandiose world of Romanticism had been resolutely ordered and compressed; but now the objective point of view of Naturalism, the machine-like technique which went with it, begin to cramp the poet's imagination, to prove inadequate to convey what he feels. The reader begins to chafe at the strain, and the artist begins to betray it. Huysmans described Leconte de Lisle as "the sonorous hardware man": we remember Wordsworth's strictures on Pope. Literature is rebounding again from the scientific-classical pole to the poetic-romantic one. And this second reaction at the end of the century, this counterpart to the Romantic reaction of the end of the century before, was known in France as Symbolism.

Now in attempting to write literary history, one must guard against giving the impression that these movements and counter-movements necessarily follow one another in a punctual and well-generalised fashion—as if eighteenth-century reason had been cleanly put to rout by nineteenth-century Romanticism, which then proceeded to hold the field till it was laid by the heels by Naturalism, and as if Mallarmé and Rimbaud had then blown up Naturalism with bombs. What really happens, of course, is that one

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set of methods and ideas is not completely superseded by another; but that, on the contrary, it thrives in its teeth—so that, on the one hand, Flaubert's prose has learned to hear, see and feel with the delicate senses of Romanticism at the same time that Flaubert is disciplining and criticizing the Romantic temperament; and so that, on the other hand, certain members of a school, unaffected by new influences abroad, will continue to practise its methods and to exploit its possibilities further and further, when nearly everybody else has abandoned it.

I have here purposely been selecting writers who seemed to represent some tendency or school in its purest or most highly developed form. We must, however, now consider some Romantics who, in certain ways, carried Romanticism further than even Chateaubriand or Musset, or than Wordsworth or Byron, and who became the first precursors of Symbolism and were afterwards placed among its saints.

One of these was the French writer who called himself Gérard de Nerval. Gérard de Nerval suffered from spells of insanity; and, partly no doubt as a result of this, habitually confused his own fancies and feelings with external reality. He believed, even in his lucid periods—and no doubt Whitehead would approve his metaphysics—that the world which we see about us is involved in some more intimate fashion than is ordinarily supposed with the things that go on in our minds, that even our dreams and hallucinations are somehow bound up with reality. And in one of his sonnets he outdoes Wordsworth, with

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his "Presences of Nature in the sky" and his "Souls of lonely places," by imagining shuttered eyes coming to life in the very walls and "a pure spirit under the bark of stones."

But a more important prophet of Symbolism was Edgar Allan Poe. It was in general true that, by the middle of the century, the Romantic writers in the United States—Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman and even Emerson—were, for reasons which it would be interesting to determine, developing in the direction of Symbolism; and one of the events of prime importance in the early history of the Symbolist Movement was the discovery of Poe by Baudelaire. When Baudelaire, a late Romantic, first read Poe in 1847, he "experienced a strange commotion." When he began to look up Poe's writings in the files of American magazines, he found among them stories and poems which he said that he himself had already "thought vaguely and confusedly" of writing, and his interest became a veritable passion. In 1852, Baudelaire published a volume of translations of Poe's tales; and from then on the influence of Poe played an important part in French literature. Poe's critical writings provided the first scriptures of the Symbolist Movement, for he had formulated what amounted to a new literary programme which corrected the Romantic looseness and lopped away the Romantic extravagance, at the same time that it aimed, not at Naturalistic, but at ultra-Romantic effects. There was, of course, a good deal in common between Poe's poetry and such Romantic poetry as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan,"

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as there was between his poems in prose and such Romantic prose as that of De Quincey. But Poe, by insisting on and specially cultivating certain aspects of Romanticism, helped to transform it into something different. "*I know*," we find Poe writing, for example, "that indefiniteness is an element of the true music [of poetry]—I mean of the true musical expression . . . a suggestive indefiniteness of vague and therefore of spiritual *effect*." And to approximate the indefiniteness of music was to become one of the principal aims of Symbolism.

This effect of indefiniteness was produced not merely by the confusion I have mentioned between the imaginary world and the real; but also by means of a further confusion between the perceptions of the different senses.

"Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent . . .
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent,"

wrote Baudelaire. And we find Poe, in one of his poems, *hearing* the approach of the darkness, or writing such a description as the following of the sensations which follow death: "Night arrived; and with its shadows a heavy discomfort. It oppressed my limbs with the oppression of some dull weight, and was palpable. There was also a moaning sound, not unlike the distant reverberation of surf, but more continuous, which beginning with the first twilight, had grown in strength with the darkness. Suddenly lights were brought into the room . . . and issuing from the flame of each lamp, there flowed unbrokenly into my ears a strain of melodious monotone."

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This notation of super-rational sensations was a novelty in the forties of the last century—as was the dreamlike irrational musical poetry of “Annabel Lee” and “Ulalume”; and they helped to effect a revolution in France. For an English-speaking reader of to-day, Poe’s influence may be hard to understand; and even when such a reader comes to examine the productions of French Symbolism, it may surprise him that they should have caused amazement. The medley of images; the deliberately mixed metaphors; the combination of passion and wit—of the grand and the prosaic manners; the bold amalgamation of material with spiritual—all these may seem to him quite proper and familiar. He has always known them in the English poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Shakespeare and the other Elizabethans did all these things without theorizing about them. Is this not the natural language of poetry? Is it not the norm against which, in English literature, the eighteenth century was a heresy and to which the Romantics did their best to return?

But we must remember that the development of French poetry has been quite different from that of English. Michelet says that in the sixteenth century the future of French literature had hung in the balance between Rabelais and Ronsard, and he regrets that it was Ronsard who triumphed. For Rabelais in France was a sort of equivalent to our own Elizabethans, whereas Ronsard, who represented to Michelet all that was poorest, driest and most conventional in the French genius, was one of the fathers

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of that classical tradition of lucidity, sobriety and purity which culminated in Molière and Racine. In comparison with the Classicism of the French, which has dominated their whole literature since the Renaissance, the English Classicism of the eighteenth century, the age of Dr. Johnson and Pope, was a brief ineffective deviation. And from the point of view of English readers, the most daring innovations of the Romantic revolution in France, in spite of all the excitement which accompanied them, must appear of an astonishingly moderate character. But the age and the rigor of the tradition were the measure of the difficulty of breaking out of it. After all, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats—in spite of Pope and Dr. Johnson—had only to look back to Milton and Shakespeare, whose dense forests had all along been in view beyond the formal eighteenth-century gardens. But to an eighteenth-century Frenchman like Voltaire, Shakespeare was incomprehensible; and to the Frenchman of the classical tradition of the beginning of the nineteenth century, the rhetoric of Hugo was a scandal: the French were not used to such rich colors or to so free a vocabulary; moreover, the Romantics broke metrical rules far stricter than any we have had in English. Yet Victor Hugo was still very far from the variety and freedom of Shakespeare. It is enlightening to compare Shelley's lyric which begins, "O World! O Life! O Time!" with the poem of Alfred de Musset's which begins, "J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie." These two lyrics are in some ways curiously similar: each is the breath of a Romantic sigh over the passing of the pride

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of youth. Yet the French poet, even in his wistfulness, makes epigrammatic points: his language is always logical and precise; whereas the English poet is vague and gives us images unrelated by logic. And it will not be till the advent of the Symbolists that French poetry will really become capable of the fantasy and fluidity of English.

The Symbolist Movement broke those rules of French metrics which the Romantics had left intact, and it finally succeeded in throwing overboard completely the clarity and logic of the French classical tradition, which the Romantics had still to a great extent respected. It was nourished from many alien sources—German, Flemish, modern Greek—and especially, precisely, from English. Verlaine had lived in England, and knew English well; Mallarmé was a professor of English; and Baudelaire, as I have said, had provided the movement with its first programmes by translating the essays of Poe. Two of the Symbolist poets, Stuart Merrill and Francis Vielé-Griffin, were Americans who lived in Paris and wrote French; and an American, reading to-day the latter's "*Chevauchée d'Yeldis*," for example, may wonder how, when Symbolism was new, such a poem could ever have been regarded as one of the movement's acknowledged masterpieces: to us, it seems merely agreeable, not in the least revolutionary or novel, but like something which might not impossibly have been written by Thomas Bailey Aldrich if he had been influenced by Browning. We are surprised to learn that Vielé-Griffin is still considered an important poet.

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But the point was that he had performed a feat which astonished and impressed the French and of which it is probable that no Frenchman was capable: he had succeeded in wrecking once for all the classical Alexandrine, hitherto the basis of French poetry—or rather, as an English reader at once recognizes, he had dispensed with it altogether and begun writing English metres in French. The French called this “*vers libre*,” but it is “free” only in the sense of being irregular, like many poems of Matthew Arnold and Browning.

What made Poe particularly acceptable to the French, however, was what had distinguished him from most of the other Romantics of the English-speaking countries: his interest in æsthetic theory. The French have always reasoned about literature far more than the English have; they always want to know what they are doing and why they are doing it: their literary criticism has acted as a constant interpreter and guide to the rest of their literature. And it was in France that Poe’s literary theory, to which no one seems to have paid much attention elsewhere, was first studied and elucidated. So that, though the effects and devices of Symbolism were of a kind that was familiar in English, and though the Symbolists were sometimes indebted to English literature directly—the Symbolist Movement itself, by reason of its origin in France, had a deliberate self-conscious æsthetic which made it different from anything in English. One must go back to Coleridge to find in English a figure comparable to the Symbolist leader, Stéphane Mallarmé. Paul Valéry

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says of Mallarmé that, as he was the greatest French poet of his time, he could also have been one of the most popular. But Mallarmé was an unpopular poet: he taught English for a living, and wrote little and published less. Yet, ridiculed and denounced by the public, who reiterated that his poetry was nonsense and yet were irritated by his seriousness and obstinacy, he exercised, from his little Paris apartment, where he held Tuesday receptions, an influence curiously far-reaching over the young writers—English and French alike—of the end of the century. There in the sitting-room which was also the dining-room on the fourth floor in the Rue de Rome, where the whistle of locomotives came in through the windows to mingle with the literary conversation, Mallarmé, with his shining pensive gaze from under his long lashes and always smoking a cigarette “to put some smoke,” as he used to say, “between the world and himself,” would talk about the theory of poetry in a “mild, musical and unforgettable voice.” There was an atmosphere “calm and almost religious.” Mallarmé had “the pride of the inner life,” said one of his friends; his nature was “patient, disdainful and imperiously gentle.” He always reflected before he spoke and always put what he said in the form of a question. His wife sat beside him embroidering; his daughter answered the door. Here came Huysmans, Whistler, Degas, Moréas, Laforgue, Vielé-Griffin, Paul Valéry, Henri de Régnier, Pierre Louys, Paul Claudel, Remy de Gourmont, André Gide, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, George Moore and W. B. Yeats. For Mallarmé was a true saint of literature:

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he had proposed to himself an almost impossible object, and he pursued it without compromise or distraction. His whole life was dedicated to the effort to do something with the language of poetry which had never been done before. "Donner un sens plus pur," he had written in a sonnet on Poe, "aux mots de la tribu." He was, as Albert Thibaudet has said, engaged in "a disinterested experiment on the confines of poetry, at a limit where other lungs would find the air unbreathable."

What, then, was this purer sense which Mallarmé believed he was following Poe in wishing to give to the words of the tribe? What, precisely, was the nature of this experiment on the confines of poetry which Mallarmé found so absorbing and which so many other writers tried to repeat? What, precisely, did the Symbolists propose? I have called attention, in speaking of Poe, to the confusion between the perceptions of the different senses, and to the attempt to make the effects of poetry approximate to those of music. And I should add, in this latter connection, that the influence on Symbolist poetry of Wagner was as important as that of any poet: at the time when Romantic music had come closest to literature, literature was attracted toward music. I have also spoken, in connection with Gérard de Nerval, of the confusion between the imaginary and the real, between our sensations and fancies, on the one hand, and what we actually do and see, on the other. It was the tendency of Symbolism—that second swing of the pendulum away from a mechanistic view of nature and from a social conception of man—to

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make poetry even more a matter of the sensations and emotions of the individual than had been the case with Romanticism: Symbolism, indeed, sometimes had the result of making poetry so much a private concern of the poet's that it turned out to be incommunicable to the reader. The peculiar subtlety and difficulty of Symbolism is indicated by the name itself. This name has often been complained of as being inadequate for the movement to which it was given and inappropriate to certain of its aspects; and it may prove misleading to English readers. For the symbols of Symbolism have to be defined a little differently from symbols in the ordinary sense—the sense in which the Cross is the symbol of Christianity or the Stars and Stripes the symbol of the United States. This symbolism differs even from such symbolism as Dante's. For the familiar kind of symbolism is conventional and fixed; the symbolism of the *Divine Comedy* is conventional, logical and definite. But the symbols of the Symbolist school are usually chosen arbitrarily by the poet to stand for special ideas of his own—they are a sort of disguise for these ideas. "The Parnassians, for their part," wrote Mallarmé, "take the thing just as it is and put it before us—and consequently they are deficient in mystery: they deprive the mind of the delicious joy of believing that it is creating. To name an object is to do away with the three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little: to suggest it, to evoke it—that is what charms the imagination."

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To intimate things rather than state them plainly was thus one of the primary aims of the Symbolists. But there was more involved in their point of view than Mallarmé here explains. The assumptions which underlay Symbolism lead us to formulate some such doctrine as the following: Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of consciousness, is different from every other; and it is, in consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and universal language of ordinary literature. Each poet has his unique personality; each of his moments has its special tone, its special combination of elements. And it is the poet's task to find, to invent, the special language which will alone be capable of expressing his personality and feelings. Such a language must make use of symbols: what is so special, so fleeting and so vague cannot be conveyed by direct statement or description, but only by a succession of words, of images, which will serve to suggest it to the reader. The Symbolists themselves, full of the idea of producing with poetry effects like those of music, tended to think of these images as possessing an abstract value like musical notes and chords. But the words of our speech are not musical notation, and what the symbols of Symbolism really were, were metaphors detached from their subjects—for one cannot, beyond a certain point, in poetry, merely enjoy color and sound for their own sake: one has to guess what the images are being applied to. And Symbolism may be defined as an attempt by carefully studied means—a complicated association of ideas repre-

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sented by a medley of metaphors—to communicate unique personal feelings.

The Symbolist Movement proper was first largely confined to France and principally limited to poetry of rather an esoteric kind; but it was destined, as time went on, to spread to the whole western world and its principles to be applied on a scale which the most enthusiastic of its founders could scarcely have foreseen. Remy de Gourmont, who was eventually to become the most distinguished critical champion of the movement, tells of his excitement, one afternoon in the eighties, at discovering the new poetry in a little magazine which he had picked up at a book-stall in the Odéon: "As I looked through it, I experienced the little æsthetic thrill and that exquisite impression of novelty which has so much charm for youth. I seem to myself to have been dreaming rather than reading. The Luxembourg was pink with early April: I crossed it toward the Rue d'Assas, thinking a great deal more about the new literature which was coinciding for me that day with the renewal of the world than about the business which had brought me to that part of Paris. All that I had written up to that time inspired me with profound disgust. . . . In less than an hour my literary orientation was radically modified." And Yeats wrote in 1897: "The reaction against the rationalism of the eighteenth century has mingled with a reaction against the materialism of the nineteenth century, and the symbolical movement, which has come to perfection in Germany in Wagner, in England in the Pre-Raphaelites, and in France in Villiers de L'Isle-

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Adam and Mallarmé and Maeterlinck, and has stirred the imagination of Ibsen and D'Annunzio, is certainly the only movement that is saying new things."

We do not talk about Symbolism to-day in dealing with English literature; we do not even, as Yeats did at the end of the last century, think of the writers whom he mentions as all belonging to a "symbolical movement"; yet the influence of Mallarmé and his fellow poets was felt widely and deeply outside of France, and it is difficult to understand certain of the things which have been happening lately in English literature without some knowledge of the Symbolist school. I believe, in fact, that if English and American criticism have sometimes shown themselves at a loss when confronted with the work of certain recent writers, it is partly because the work of these writers is the result of a literary revolution which occurred outside English literature. The case of the Romantic Movement was different: Wordsworth's prefaces were English manifestoes; Lockhart's attack on Keats and Byron's attack on Jeffrey were blows struck in an English civil war. But in spite of the Pre-Raphaelites, who were launched by an impulse somewhat similar to that of the Symbolists, and in spite of the English "æsthetics" and "decadents," who for the most part imitated the French without very much originality, the battle of Symbolism has never properly been fought out in English. So that whereas French writers like Valéry and Proust who have grown out of the Symbolist Movement, are well understood and appreciated by French literary criticism, the critics of the English-

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speaking countries have often seemed not to know how to deal with writers such as Eliot and Joyce. Even when these writers have brought back into English qualities which are natural to it and resources which it originally possessed, these elements have returned by way of France and have taken on the complexion of the French mind—critical, philosophical, much occupied with æsthetic theory and tending always to aim self-consciously at particular effects and to study scrupulously appropriate means.

It has perhaps been peculiarly easy for certain of the leaders of contemporary English literature—that is, of the literature since the War—to profit by the example of Paris, because they have themselves not been English. Of the writers in English I shall discuss in this book, Yeats is an Irishman who turns almost as easily toward Paris as toward London; Joyce an Irishman who has done most of his work on the Continent and who has scarcely lived in England at all; and T. S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein are Americans living abroad. The work of these writers has been largely a continuance or extension of Symbolism. Yeats, the ablest of the *fin de siècle* group who tried in London to emulate the French, managed to make Symbolism flourish triumphantly by transplanting it to the more favorable soil of Ireland. T. S. Eliot in his earliest poems seems to have been as susceptible to the influence of the Symbolists as to that of the English Elizabethans. Joyce, a master of Naturalism as great as Flaubert, has at the same time succeeded in dramatizing Symbolism by making use of its methods for differentiating between his

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various characters and their varying states of mind. And Gertrude Stein has carried Mallarmé's principles so far in the direction of that limit where other lungs find the air unbreathable as perhaps finally to reduce them to absurdity. It is true, however, that under proper conditions, these principles remain valid; and both the strength and the weaknesses characteristic of much of the literature since the War derive naturally from the Symbolist poets and may already be studied in their work. The literary history of our time is to a great extent that of the development of Symbolism and of its fusion or conflict with Naturalism.

II

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BORN in Dublin in 1865, William Butler Yeats was the son of an Irish Pre-Raphaelite painter, who had given him, at "fifteen or sixteen," Rossetti and Blake to read. Yeats's earliest verse was Pre-Raphaelite and Romantic: his long poem, "The Wanderings of Oisín" (1889), on a subject from Irish mythology, stains a kind of Shelleyan fluidity with a Keatsian richness of color. But, during the nineties, Yeats met Mallarmé in Paris, and though he knew at that time little French, was instructed in the doctrines of Symbolism by his friend Arthur Symons. "I think," he says, "that Symons's translations from Mallarmé may have given elaborate form to my verses of those years, to the latter poems of 'The Wind among the Reeds,' to 'The Shadowy Waters.'" And we have seen that he wrote of Symbolism as "the only movement that is saying new things."

If we do not ordinarily think of Yeats as primarily a Symbolist poet, it is because, in taking Symbolism to Ireland, he fed it with new resources and gave it a special accent which lead us to think of his poetry from the point of view of its national qualities rather than from the point of view of its relation to the rest of European literature.

It is easy, however, to see how close Yeats is, even in his later years, to the French poetry of the end of the century,

in such a comparatively recent poem as "On a Picture of a Black Centaur":

"Your hooves have stamped at the black margin of the wood,
Even where horrible green parrots call and swing.
My works are all stamped down into the sultry mud.
I knew that horse play, knew it for a murderous thing.
What wholesome sun has ripened is wholesome food to eat
And that alone; yet I, being driven half insane
Because of some green wing, gathered old mummy wheat
In the mad abstract dark and ground it grain by grain
And after baked it slowly in an oven; but now
I bring full flavoured wine out of a barrel found
Where seven Ephesian topers slept and never knew
When Alexander's empire past, they slept so sound.
Stretch out your limbs and sleep a long Saturnian sleep;
I have loved you better than my soul for all my words,
And there is none so fit to keep a watch and keep
Unwearied eyes upon those horrible green birds."

Compare this with a characteristic sonnet of Mallarmé's:

"Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui?

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
Par l'espace infligée à l'oiseau qui le nie,
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.

Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,
Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris
Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne."

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The centaur, the parrots, the wheat and the wine are, like the swan, the lake and the frost, not real things (except that the centaur is something Yeats has seen in a picture), but merely accidental images which, by an association of ideas, have come to stand for the poet's emotion. But where the French poets were obliged to depend almost exclusively upon such symbols, which tended to become more bewildering as they became more heterogeneous, Yeats found in Irish mythology, unfamiliar even to Irish readers, and in itself rather cloudy and vague, a treasury of symbols ready to his hand. He had thus perhaps a special advantage. The Danaan children, the Shadowy Horses and Fergus with his brazen cars—those mysterious and magical beings who play so large a part in Yeats's verse—have little more objective reality than the images of Mallarmé: they are the elements and the moods of Yeats's complex sensibility. But they have a more satisfactory character than such a French Symbolist mythology as Mallarmé's—though Mallarmé does occasionally draw on the Old Testament or the classics for a Salome or a faun—because they constitute a world of which one can to some extent get the hang, where one can at least partly find one's way about.

And, as we follow the progress of Yeats's poetry, this world becomes less dim and iridescent. In "The Wind among the Reeds," which appeared in 1899, we still find "the flaming lute-thronged angelic door" and "the heaven's embroidered cloths—enwrought with golden and silver light" of the earlier Pre-Raphaelite Yeats. But some-

time about the beginning of the century, the poet became dissatisfied, he tells us, and set out rigorously to eliminate from his poetry both Romantic rhetoric and Symbolistic mistiness.

The development of Yeats's later style seems to coincide with a disillusionment. The younger Yeats has lived much in fairyland: the heroes of his short stories and poems—Oisín, Red Hanrahan, the Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland—are always deserting the real world for the world of the Sidhe, the fairies. The real world is a sad unsatisfactory place: in one of the very first of Yeats's poems, the fairies warn the child they are stealing away—

“Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.”

And the mortals who escape to fairyland find eternal love-making and laughter: they dance on twilit lawns to strange music. The Irish fairies of Yeats are not, like the fairies of the ordinary fairy-story, merely smaller human beings like ourselves, possessed of special supernatural powers: they are a different order of beings altogether, existing, as it were, in different dimensions. This strangeness, this real other-worldliness of the fairyland of Yeats's poetry, derives partly, no doubt, it would appear from the fascinating anthology of Irish fairy-tales which Yeats compiled and edited, from Irish folk-lore itself. The Sidhe were the natural creation of the dreaming and mocking

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Irish mind amid the illusory uncertain lights and mists of the Irish countryside. But Yeats has made of this Irish fairyland something which puts upon us a stronger spell than the spell even of the folk-tales in his anthology. Yeats's fairyland has become a symbol for the imagination itself. The world of the imagination is shown us in Yeats's early poetry as something infinitely delightful, infinitely seductive, as something to which one becomes addicted, with which one becomes delirious and drunken—and as something which is somehow incompatible with, and fatal to, the good life of that actual world which is so full of weeping and from which it is so sweet to withdraw. There is nothing sinister about the Sidhe in themselves: they are non-moral and relieved of mortal cares; for them, there is not even time; and from our human point of view, their fairy point of view is unseizable. But to the mortal who has lived among the fairies, who has lost the sense of human laws in their world, the consequences may be terrible—for he has preferred something else to reality—he has escaped the responsibilities of human life and he must fail of its satisfactions. The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland, in one of the most beautiful of Yeats's early poems, had

“ . . . stood among a crowd at Drumahair;
His heart hung all upon a silken dress,
And he had known at last some tenderness,
Before Earth made of him her sleepy care;
But when a man poured fish into a pile,
It seemed they raised their little silver heads,
And sang how day a Druid twilight sheds

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Upon a dim, green, well-beloved isle,
Where people love beside star-laden seas;
How Time may never mar their faery vows
Under the woven roofs of quicken boughs:
The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lisadill;
His mind ran all on money cares and fears,
And he had known at last some prudent years
Before they heaped his grave under the hill;
But while he passed before a plashy place,
A lug-worm with its gray and muddy mouth
Sang how somewhere to north or west or south,
There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race;
And how beneath those three times blessed skies
A Danaan fruitage makes a shower of moons,
And as it falls awakens leafy tunes:
And at that singing he was no more wise."

And so with all our human needs and passions—the man who dreamed of fairyland is always being distracted from them by intimations of a world outside our world; and even when he is dead, he can find "no comfort in the grave." So in another poem, the joys of the "Happy Townland" where "boughs have their fruit and blossom at all times of the year," where "rivers are running over with red beer and brown beer" and where "queens, their eyes blue like the ice, are dancing in a crowd," are irreconcilable with real life: the enchanted Happy Townland is also "the world's bane."

In the prose stories of Yeats's early period, this fairyland appears under its real aspect as the life of revery and imagination—and of solitude. The narrator of "Rosa Al-

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chemica" exiles himself from the world in a house where tapestries, "full of the blue and bronze of peacocks . . . shut out all history and activity untouched with beauty and peace," and where he is able to find in "antique bronze gods and goddesses . . . all a pagan's delight in various beauty . . . without his terror at sleepless destiny and his labor with many sacrifices." Another solitary, Michael Robartes, lives on the lonely Irish coast in a house which he calls "the Temple of the Alchemical Rose" and where by night the immortal spirits of beautiful long-dead men and women from Egypt and from Greece come to dance in a mosaic-lined room, with a great rose in mosaic on the ceiling. It was characteristic of the *fin de siècle* writers to want to stand apart from the common life and live only in the imagination. I have said that the battle of Symbolism was never properly fought out in English; but there was one writer in England who played a rôle somewhat similar to that of Mallarmé in France. Walter Pater was, like Mallarmé, a man of much intellectual originality who, living quietly and writing little, had a profound influence on the literature of his time. More nearly than anyone else, he supplied, in his literary criticism, an English equivalent to the Symbolist theory of the French. When Pater says that experience gives us, "not the truth of eternal outlines, ascertained once for all, but a world of fine gradations and subtly linked conditions, shifting intricately as we ourselves change," he is stating a point of view exactly similar to that of the Symbolists. But it was less in the field of æsthetic theory than

in that of the appreciation of life that Pater developed this point of view. The famous conclusion to "The Renaissance" fixed the ideal of a whole generation: "To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the fashion of modern thought. . . . The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses?" "We looked consciously to Pater for our philosophy," Yeats wrote of himself and his friends; and the tapestried house, the Alchemical Temple, had been invented as ideal abodes where this philosophy might be put into practice—as Yeats's fairyland itself had been but one of the imaginary domains of the *fin de siècle* mind.

But just as Yeats's early poetry presents the fascination of fairyland as something inimical to life in the real world, so these stories of the life of ecstatic revery, unlike the typical writings of the *fin de siècle* æsthetes, are edged with a consciousness of dangers and temptations inescapably involved in such a life. In Yeats, we find the æstheticism of Pater carried through to its consequences.

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What *is* the consequence of living for beauty, as beauty was then understood, of cultivating the imagination, the enjoyment of æsthetic sensations, as a supreme end in itself? We shall be thrown fatally out of key with reality—we shall incur penalties which are not to be taken lightly. There is a conflict here which cannot be evaded; and Yeats, even in his earliest period, is unceasingly aware of this conflict. But still he prefers to dwell most of the time in fairyland or among the dancers of the Alchemical Temple. He would even transport his human love, his human desire, into the climate of that immortal world, where nothing that is ugly can jar and where nothing that is beautiful fades:

“All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my
heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, remade, like a casket
of gold

For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of
my heart.”

But now, in the period inaugurated by “The Green Helmet” (published in 1912), the balance is to dip on the other side. In the frustration of early love, apparently, he has paid the price of escaping to fairyland, and the memory of it is bitter: he still champions, he still puts above everything, the nobility and splendor of the imagination;

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but he must face life's hard conditions. And the consciousness of inexorable limits has brought his art to a sharper focus—the unbinding of “youth's dreamy load” has made him a better poet. No longer content with the ice-eyed queens of fairyland at the same time that he no longer hopes from real life any satisfaction other than the triumph of imagination through art, he applies to poetry all the vigor of his intellect and all the energy of his passion. He would reduce his verse to something definite and hard—at the same time more severe and more passionate. Now the soap-bubble colors vanish; the music of fairyland dies away; we behold only, earthly and clear, the bare outlines of “cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn.”

In a poem which is at once a description of this style and an admirable example of it, he tells how,

“Maybe a twelvemonth since
Suddenly I began
In scorn of this audience
Imagining a man,
And his sun-freckled face,
And gray Connemara cloth,
Climbing up to a place
Where stone is dark under froth,
And the down turn of his wrist
When the flies drop in the stream:
A man who does not exist,
A man who is but a dream;
And cried, ‘Before I am old
I shall have written him one
Poem maybe as cold
And passionate as the dawn.’”

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Yeats inhabits, in this phase, a world of pure intense emotions expressed in distinct fine images. His words, no matter how prosaic, are always somehow luminous and noble, as if pale pebbles smoothed by the sea were to take on some mysterious value and become more precious than jewels or gold. He is less prodigal now of symbols and names, and his visions have a new austerity:

“I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare.”

When he returns to the heroic world of Irish mythology, he describes it with a new homeliness of detail. And more and more steadily he fixes his attention upon the actual world about him. He has come to desire above everything, as he says in another part of the poem about the fisherman,

“To write for my own race
And for the reality.”

And again, in another poem:

“Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth.”

He finds his subjects now in the events of his own life,

no longer transposed into romantic convention, and in the public affairs of Ireland. And he succeeds in dignifying such subjects, as perhaps no other contemporary poet has done, at the same time that he never ceases to deal with them without sentimentality and in the plainest language. He can even challenge comparison with Dante—whom he now describes as “the chief imagination of Christendom”—by his ability to sustain a grand manner through sheer intensity without rhetorical heightening. He assumes, indeed, a kind of Dantesque mask. How he suggests the compactness and point of Dante’s two- or three-line allusions in such a passage as,

“Traders or soldiers who have left me blood
That has not passed through any huxter’s loin,
Pardon, and you that did not weigh the cost,
Olc’ Butlers when you took to horse and stood
Beside the brackish waters of the Boyne
Till your bad master blenched and all was lost” . . .

and Dante’s epigrammatic bitterness in,

“Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets against the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?”

And he has also a Dantesque exaltation—an exaltation no longer the opium dream of fairyland, but such as life has to offer within its limits: the admiration for ancestor or

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friend, the pride in honor kept or work well done, the wild memory of early love:

“And what of her that took
All till my youth was gone
With scarce a pitying look?
How should I praise that one?
When day begins to break
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had,
What eagle look still shows,
While up from my heart's root
So great a sweetness flows
I shake from head to foot.”

II

With the development of this maturer style, it became impossible any longer to regard Yeats merely as one of the best of the English lyric poets of the nineties. The author of “The Lake of Innisfree,” which had so delighted Robert Louis Stevenson, had grown, in an interval of ten years during which nobody outside of Ireland had apparently paid much attention to him, to the unmistakable stature of a master. No other poet writing English in our time has been able to deal with supreme artistic success with such interesting and such varied experience. No other writer has been able to sustain the traditional grand manner of the poet with so little effect of self-consciousness.

And in spite of the immense amount of poetry published and read to-day, the personality truly and naturally

poetic seems to be becoming rarer and rarer. It may be true that the kind of dignity and distinction which have been characteristic of the poet in the past are becoming more and more impossible in our modern democratic society and during a period when the ascendancy of scientific ideas has made man conscious of his kinship with the other animals and of his subjection to biological and physical laws rather than of his relation to the gods. It was easy for the lyric poet, from Wyatt's age to Waller's, to express himself both directly and elegantly, because he was a courtier, or, in any case, a member of a comparatively small educated class, whose speech combined the candor and naturalness of conversation among equals with the grace of a courtly society. It was possible for him honestly to take up a residence in an intellectual world where poetic images stood for actualities because the scientific language and technique for dealing with these actualities had not yet come to permeate thought. But the modern poet who would follow this tradition, and who would yet deal with life in any large way, must create for himself a special personality, must maintain a state of mind, which shall shut out or remain indifferent to many aspects of the contemporary world. This necessity accounts partly, I suppose, for Yeats's preoccupation in his prose writings with what he calls the Mask or Anti-Self, a sort of imaginary personality, quite antagonistic to other elements of one's nature, which the poet must impose upon himself. It is hard to imagine a seventeenth-century poet being driven to such a theory—a theory which makes

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one's poetic self figure as one of the halves of a split personality; and it seems true that Yeats himself has not been able to keep up his poetic rôle without a certain effort. We find, at any rate, in his criticism and his autobiographical writings a remarkably honest and illuminating account of the difficulties of remaining a poet during the age in which we live.

Yeats seems to be conscious from the first of an antagonism between the actual world of industry, politics and science, on the one hand, and the imaginative poetic life, on the other. He tells us, in his autobiography, that a vital issue seemed to be raised for him, in his boyhood, by the then popular and novel realism of Bastien-Lepage and Carolus Durand as against the mysticism of the Pre-Raphaelite painters. Bastien-Lepage's "clownish peasant staring with vacant eyes at her great boots" represented already to the young Yeats that Naturalistic, scientific vision which contradicted and warred with his own. And he takes up from the beginning, in his criticism, a definite and explicit position in regard to Naturalism: he will stand apart from the democratic, the scientific, modern world—his poetic life shall be independent of it; his art shall owe nothing to its methods. His principles in literature are those of the Symbolists, but he formulates them more clearly and defends them with more vigor than anyone else has yet done in English.

"There is," he asserts in his early essay on the symbolism of Shelley, "for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture, that is the image of his secret

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life, for wisdom first speaks in images and . . . this one image, if he would but brood over it his whole life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world, into that far household, where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp." All great literature, says Yeats, is created out of symbols: observations and statistics mean nothing; works of art which depend upon them can have no enduring value. "There is something," he says, "of an old wives' tale in fine literature. The makers of it are like an old peasant telling stories of the great famine or the hangings of '98 or from his own memories. He has felt something in the depth of his mind and he wants to make it as visible and powerful to our senses as possible. He will use the most extravagant words or illustrations if they will suit his purpose. Or he will invent a wild parable, and the more his mind is on fire or the more creative it is, the less will he look at the outer world or value it for its own sake. It gives him metaphors and examples, and that is all. He is even a little scornful of it, for it seems to him while the fit is on that the fire has gone out of it and left it but white ashes. I cannot explain it, but I am certain that every high thing was invented in this way, between sleeping and waking, as it were, and that peering and peeping persons are but hawkers of stolen goods. How else could their noses have grown so ravenous or their eyes so sharp?"

And in all his activity as playwright and journalist in

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connection with the Abbey Theatre, Yeats is leading a reaction against Naturalism. This reaction, which, by way of Germany and under the name of Expressionism, has attracted so much more attention since the War, had not, at the time of the founding of the Abbey Theatre, manifested itself very vigorously on the Continent. Symbolism did not play yet in the theatre the rôle that it was playing in poetry. Yet its seeds had already sprouted here and there. August Strindberg, returning from Paris to Sweden, wrote between 1899 and 1902 the Symbolistic "To Damascus" and "Dream Play," the prototypes of the German Expressionistic drama; and Maeterlinck, with vague, pale and suave images, quite different from Strindberg's lively, queer and dissonant ones, had created quite a little theatre of Symbolism. Now Yeats, in his own dramatic works, has produced a theatre somewhat similar to Maeterlinck's. The productions of a greater poet, equipped with a richer and more solid mythology, these plays do, however, take place in the same sort of twilit world as Maeterlinck's—a world in which the characters are less often dramatic personalities than disembodied broodings and longings. Yeats's plays have little dramatic importance because Yeats himself has little sense of drama, and we think of them primarily as a department of his poetry, with the same sort of interest and beauty as the rest. But Yeats, the director and propagandist of the Abbey Theatre, does have considerable importance in the history of the modern stage. The Abbey Theatre itself, of recent years, with the Gorky-Chekhovesque plays of Sean O'Casey, has taken a

Naturalistic turn which Yeats never contemplated or desired; but his long and uncompromising campaign for a revival of poetic drama contributed much to contemporary efforts to break up the rigid technique and clear the stage of the realistic encumbrances of the Naturalistic drama. Yeats's greatest contribution to the theatre has been, not his own plays, but those of Synge, whom in 1896 he discovered stagnating in Paris and induced to return to Ireland. Synge succeeded, on a small scale, during the few years before he died, in creating for the Abbey Theatre perhaps the most authentic example of poetic drama which the modern stage has seen.

Yeats at this period, the period of the founding and the first battles of the Abbey Theatre, is both active and effective. There has always been more of the public figure and more of the pugnacious Irishman about him than his philosophy invites us to believe. But this philosophy never ceases to insist upon the irreconcilable opposition between the life of self-assertion in the practical world and the life consecrated to the recovery and contemplation of the precious symbol, which, "if he [the poet] would but brood over it his whole life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world," into the presence of the gods. Yeats recurs again and again to the necessity of mortifying the will: "Every visionary knows that the mind's eye soon comes to see a capricious and variable world, which the will cannot shape or change, though it can call it up and banish it again"; "We must find some place upon the Tree of Life

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for the Phœnix nest, for the passion that is exaltation and the negation of the will"; the style of the dialogue in Synge's plays "blurs definition, clear edges, everything that comes from the will, it turns imagination from all that is of the present, like a gold background in a religious picture, and it strengthens in every emotion whatever comes to it from far off, from brooding memory and dangerous hope," etc.

For the rest, Yeats's prose, in its beginnings, when he is most under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites and Pater, is a little self-consciously archaic—it has a Renaissance elaborateness and pomposity; and it is a little too close to the language of poetry—the meaning is often clotted by metaphor. But Yeats's prose, like his verse, has, with time, undergone a discipline and emerged with a clearer outline. Yeats is to-day a master of prose as well as a great poet. He was already magnificent in his intermediate period—the period of "*Per Amica Silentia Lunae*" (1917): "We make out of the quarrel with others rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry. Unlike the rhetoricians, who get a confident voice from remembering the crowd they have won or may win, we sing amid our uncertainty; and, smitten even in the presence of the most high beauty by the knowledge of our solitude, our rhythm shudders. I think, too, that no fine poet, no matter how disordered his life, has ever, even in his mere life, had pleasure for his end. Johnson and Dowson, friends of my youth, were dissipated men, the one a drunkard, the other a drunkard and mad about women, and yet they had the

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gravity of men who had found life out and were awakening from the dream; and both, one in life and art and one in art and less in life, had a continual preoccupation with religion. Nor has any poet I have read of or heard of or met with been a sentimentalist. The other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self, as one may choose to name it, comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality. The sentimentalist is practical men who believe in money, in position, in a marriage bell, and whose understanding of happiness is to be so busy whether at work or at play, that all is forgotten but the momentary aim. They find their pleasure in a cup that is filled from Lethe's wharf, and for the awakening, for the vision, for the revelation of reality, tradition offers us a different word—ecstasy."

This is perhaps still a little *too* magnificent, still a little too much like poetry. But in his autobiography, "The Trembling of the Veil" (1922), Yeats has achieved a combination of grandeur with a certain pungency and homeliness which recalls the more lightly and swiftly moving writers of the seventeenth century rather than the more heavily upholstered ones of the earlier Renaissance. The prose of Yeats, in our contemporary literature, is like the product of some dying loomcraft brought to perfection in the days before machinery. The qualities of a good prose style in English to-day are likely to be those of a sound intellectual currency, clipped out by a sharp cutter and stamped by a solvent mint; Rudyard Kipling, Bernard Shaw and T. S. Eliot, however else they may

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differ, have these characteristics in common. Of Samuel Butler, Shaw's master, Yeats has written that he was "the first Englishman to make the discovery that it is possible to write with great effect without music, without style, either good or bad, to eliminate from the mind all emotional implication and to prefer plain water to every vintage, so much metropolitan lead and solder to any tendril of the vine." The style of the seventeenth century, on the other hand—the style of Walton's "Lives" or Dryden's prefaces—was a much more personal thing: it fitted the author like a suit of clothes and molded itself to the natural contours of his temperament and mind; one is always aware that there is a man inside, whereas with Kipling, Eliot or Shaw, the style seems to aim at the effect of an inflexible impersonal instrument specially designed to perform special functions. Yeats's prose is, however, still a garment worn in the old-fashioned personal manner with a combination of elegance and ease, at the same time that it is unmistakably of our time by virtue of a certain modern terseness and of a characteristically modern trick—we shall encounter it later in Proust—of revealing by unexpected juxtapositions relations of which one had not been aware—"He had been almost poor," writes Yeats of Wilde in the period before his disaster, "and now, his head full of Flaubert, found himself with ten thousand a year"—or of effecting almost startling transitions from the particular to the general and back again. For Yeats has become a critic now not merely of literature, but of human life and society in general: compare the passage on

Johnson and Dowson which I have quoted above from "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," with the realistic and subtle analysis, in "The Trembling of the Veil," of the causes for the final breakdown of that "tragic generation."

III

Yeats has shown himself, in his prose writings, a man of both exceptionally wide information and exceptional intellectual curiosity; but, for all the variety of his interests and the versatility of his intelligence, he has, in rejecting the methods of modern science, cut himself off in a curious way from the general enlightened thought of his time. Yet his mind is so comprehensive and so active that he has felt the need of constructing a system: and, finding it impossible to admit the assumptions upon which most modern systems are based, he has had recourse to the only science which his position has allowed him to accept, the obsolete science of Astrology. As a young man, Yeats frequented clairvoyants and students of Astrology and Magic; Madame Blavatsky, the necromantic Theosophist, seems to have made upon him a considerable impression. And in 1901 he was led to formulate, in an essay on Magic, the following set of beliefs, to which he still apparently adheres:

"(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

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“(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

“(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.”

What Yeats was really approaching here was some such systematic study of the symbolism of myths, trances, dreams and other human visions as psychoanalysis and anthropology were attempting from a different direction. And despite the obvious charlatanism or naïveté of most of his instructors and fellow investigators, Yeats's account of his researches is interesting. For it is not merely that Yeats loves the marvellous: he is also intent upon discovering symbols which may stand for the elements of his own nature or which shall seem to possess some universal significance. The results of this research are very curious. When we read Yeats's account of his adventures among the mediums, it becomes plain that, in spite of his repudiation of science, he has always managed to leave himself a margin of scientific doubt. Like Huysmans, he betrays an instinct to scrutinize and check up on the supernatural which is disastrous to genuine mysticism. Just as in Huysmans's case, we always feel that the wistful student of Satanism has too much solid Dutch common sense really to deceive himself about his devils, so in Yeats—he himself has confessed it—the romantic amateur of Magic is always accompanied and restrained by the rationalistic modern man. “He and I often quarrelled,” Yeats writes of himself and A. E., “because I wanted him to

examine and question his visions, and write them out as they occurred; and still more because I thought symbolic what he thought real like the men and women that had passed him on the road." Yet Huysmans went so far as to claim—or at least to make one of his characters claim—as genuine examples of demoniacal possession those very hysteria cases of Charcot's which at that moment were leading Charcot's young pupil Freud to his first great discovery of the principle of emotional repression; and Yeats attributes to a sort of supernatural being designated as "Anima Mundi" precisely such universal symbols as are studied by such psychologists as Jung. What is most curious is that Yeats should at last have constructed out of these symbols an elaborate mystical-metaphysical system.

This system was set forth in "A Vision," a work which occupied Yeats for many years and which he published privately in 1926. "A Vision" presented an elaborate theory of the variation of human personality, of the vicissitudes of human history and of the transformations of the soul in this world and the next. This theory was worked out with geometrical diagrams and set forth in terms of such unfamiliar conceptions as *daimons*, *tinctures*, *cones*, *gyres*, *husks* and *passionate bodies*.

Yeats asserts that human personality follows the pattern of a "Great Wheel." That is, the types of personality possible constitute a kind of closed circle—they are regular stages in a circular journey to and fro between complete objectivity at one pole and complete subjectivity at

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the other; and this journey may be represented by the orbit of the moon, to which it corresponds. Let the moon represent subjectivity and the sun, objectivity: then the dark of the moon, when it is closest to the sun, is the phase of complete objectivity; and the full moon, which is farthest from the sun, is the phase of complete subjectivity. At these two opposite poles of the circle, human life is impossible: there exist only antipodal types of supernatural beings. But along the circumference of the circle, between these two ultra-human poles, there occur twenty-six phases which cover all possible types of human personality.

Yeats's theory of the variation of these types is extremely complicated. He begins by assigning to "incarnate man" four "Faculties": the Will, "by which is understood feeling that has not become desire . . . an energy as yet uninfluenced by thought, action or emotion"; the Mask, which means "the image of what we wish to become, or of that to which we give our reverence"; the Creative Mind, "the intellect . . . all the mind that is consciously constructive"; and the Body of Fate, "the physical and mental environment, the changing human body, the stream of Phenomena as this affects a particular individual, all that is forced upon us from without." The Will is always opposite the Mask: "it looks into a painted picture." The Creative Mind is opposite the Body of Fate: "it looks into a photograph; but both look into something which is the opposite of themselves." We follow the Will around the clock, and by combining it with the other

elements according to geometrical laws we calculate the characters of the different phases. Starting at the right of the objective pole, the soul passes first through varieties of almost purely physical life—Yeats takes his examples here from the Bacchuses and shepherds of the poets. It is moving toward subjectivity, however—Walt Whitman, Alexandre Dumas: it is seeking itself, and as it progresses, it becomes more beautiful. The ultra-human subjective phase, which apparently includes Christ, is described as “a phase of complete beauty,” where “Thought and Will are indistinguishable, effort and attainment are indistinguishable—nothing is apparent but dreaming Will and the Image that it dreams.” This is preceded and followed by phases which include Baudelaire and Beardsley; Keats and Giorgione; Blake and Rabelais; Dante and Shelley; and presumably Yeats himself: men who have withdrawn from the life of the world in order to live in their dream. But once the all-subjective phase is past, the soul

“ . . . would be the world’s servant, and as it serves,
 Choosing whatever task’s most difficult
 Among tasks not impossible, it takes
 Upon the body and upon the soul
 The coarseness of the drudge. Before the full
 It sought itself and afterwards the world.”

And it is now leaving beauty behind and headed toward deformity:

“Reformer, merchant, statesman, learned man,
 Dutiful husband, honest wife by turn,

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Cradle upon cradle, and all in flight and all
Deformed because there is no deformity
But saves us from a dream."

The soul has now come full circle: the three final human phases before the phase of complete objectivity are the Hunchback, the Saint and the Fool.

Yeats has worked all this out with great care and with considerable ingenuity. He has described each of the twenty-eight phases and supplied us with typical examples. What we find in this part of the book is Yeats's familiar preoccupation with the conflict between action and philosophy, reality and imagination. (It is amusing and characteristic that, according to his system, the side of humanity closest to the sun—that is, closest the objective nature—should be the side that is bathed in darkness, whereas the side which is furthest from the sun—that is, nearest the subjective nature—should be the side that is bright!) Now this is a subject which has hitherto, in Yeats's prose as well as in his verse, usually inspired him well; the symbols of the Mask, the Sun and Moon, etc., if they have sometimes been a little disconcerting when we encountered them in his critical writings, have created just the right impression of significance in mystery for Symbolistic poetry. And there are, to be sure, certain passages of "A Vision" as brilliant as Yeats at his best. He writes, for example, of the phase of "the Receptive Man," to which he assigns Rembrandt and Synge: "The man wipes his breath from the window pane, and laughs in his delight at all the varied scene." And of the phase of "the

Obsessed Man," to which he assigns Giorgione and Keats: "When we compare these images with those of any subsequent phase, each seems studied for its own sake; they float as in serene air, or lie hidden in some valley, and if they move it is to music that returns always to the same note, or in a dance that so returns upon itself that they seem immortal." And, in what is perhaps the most eloquent passage in the book, he returns to a certain type of beautiful uncontemplative woman who has already haunted his poetry: "Here are born those women who are most touching in their beauty. Helen was of this phase; and she comes before the mind's eye elaborating a delicate personal discipline as though she would make her whole life an image of a unified *antithetical* (that is, subjective) energy. While seeming an image of softness, and of quiet, she draws perpetually upon glass with a diamond. Yet she will not number among her sins anything that does not break that personal discipline, no matter what it may seem according to others' discipline; but if she fail in her own discipline she will not deceive herself, and for all the languor of her movements, and her indifference to the acts of others, her mind is never at peace. She will wander much alone as though she consciously meditated her masterpiece that shall be at the full moon, yet unseen by human eye, and when she returns to her house she will look upon her household with timid eyes, as though she knew that all power of self-protection had been taken away, and that of her once *primary Tincture* (that is, objective element) nothing remained but a

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strange irresponsible innocence. . . . Already perhaps, through weakness of desire, she understands nothing, while alone seeming of service. Is it not because she desires so little and gives so little that men will die and murder in her service?" And there is a strange imaginative power in the conception behind the final sequence of the Hunchback, the Saint and the Fool.

Yet "A Vision," when we try to read it, makes us impatient with Yeats. As a rule, he expounds his revelations as if he took them seriously—that is, as if he believed that *masks* and *husks* and *daimons* and *passionate bodies* were things which actually existed, as if they were as real as those visions of A. E.'s which had been as real to A. E. as the people in the street, but which Yeats had tried to induce him to question; and indeed one would think that to elaborate a mystical system so complicated and so tedious, it would be necessary to believe in it pretty strongly. Yet now and then the skeptical Yeats reasserts himself and we are startled by an unexpected suggestion that, after all, the whole thing may be merely "a background for my thought, a painted scene." If the whole thing, we ask ourselves, has been merely an invented mythology, in which Yeats himself does not believe, what right has he to bore us with it—what right has he to expect us to explore page after page of such stuff as the following description of the habits of the soul after death: "The *Spirit* first floats horizontally within the man's dead body, but then rises until it stands at his head. The *Celestial Body* is also horizontal at first but lies in the op-

posite position, its feet where the *Spirit's* head is, and then rising, as does the *Spirit*, stands up at last at the feet of the man's body. The *Passionate Body* rises straight up from the genitals and stands in the centre. The *Husk* remains in the body until the time for it to be separated and lost in *Anima Mundi*."

In "A Packet for Ezra Pound" (1929) a new light is thrown on "A Vision." We learn that Yeats's wife is a medium, and that the theories set forth in this book were communicated through her by supernatural beings. Yeats tells us how, four days after their marriage in 1917, Mrs. Yeats surprised him by attempting automatic writing. "What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer, and after some half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences. 'No,' was the answer, 'we have come to give you metaphors for poetry.' The unknown writer took his theme at first from my just published 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae.' I had made a distinction between the perfection that is from a man's combat with himself and that which is from a combat with circumstances, and upon this simple distinction he built up an elaborate classification of men according to their more or less complete expression of one type or the other. He supported his classification by a series of geometrical symbols and put these symbols in an order that answered the question in my essay as to whether some prophet could not

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prick upon the calendar the birth of a Napoleon or a Christ." Yeats describes the manifestations which accompanied these revelations: the perfumes, whistlings, smells of burnt feathers, bursts of music, apparitions of great black birds and of "persons in clothes of the late sixteenth century and of the seventeenth." On one occasion, when an owl was hooting in the garden, the dictating spirit asked for a recess: "Sounds like that," the spirit explained, "give us great pleasure." And there were also mischievous obstructive spirits who attempted to mislead the Yeatses and who were designated as "Frustrators"; "the automatic script would deteriorate, grow sentimental or confused, and when I pointed this out the communicator would say 'from such and such an hour, on such and such a day, all is frustration.' I would spread out the script and he would cross all out back to the answer that began it, but had I not divined frustration he would have said nothing."

We learn also, by the way, a fact which might, for a psychologist, throw a good deal of light on the development of Yeats's personality. It appears that not only has Yeats always succeeded in steering clear of science: he has never till recently read philosophy. "Apart from two or three of the principal Platonic Dialogues I knew no philosophy. Arguments with my father, whose convictions had been formed by John Stuart Mill's attack upon Sir William Hamilton, had destroyed my confidence and driven me from speculation to the direct experience of the Mystics. I had once known Blake as thoroughly as his

unfinished confused Prophetic Books permitted, and I had read Swedenborg and Boehme, and my initiation into the 'Hermetic Students' had filled my head with Cabalistic imagery." Now, however, he wants to study philosophy as an aid to understanding the "system." The spirits ask him to wait till they have finished. At the end of three years, when the supernatural revelations have ceased, and "A Vision" is actually in proof, Yeats takes down from Mrs. Yeats, who, it appears, did not share her husband's ignorance, a list of the philosophers she had read. For four years, Yeats applies himself to these, and what he finds makes him uneasy about "A Vision": he feels that he must partly have misinterpreted what the spirits have told him. But the spirits themselves intervene to put an end to this disquieting situation: they make him stop his philosophical studies.

As we read all this, we say to ourselves that Yeats, growing older, has grown more credulous. But we come, at the end, to the following passage: "Some will ask if I believe all that this book contains, and I will not know how to answer. Does the word belief, used as they will use it, belong to our age, can I think of the world as there and I here judging it?" And he intimates that, after all, his system may be only a set of symbols like another—a set of symbols, we recognize, like the Irish myths with which he began.

Into the personal situation suggested by Yeats's account of his revelations, it is inappropriate and unnecessary to go: the psychological situation seems plain. When Yeats,

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at the crucial period of his life, attempted to leave fairy-land behind, when he became aware of the unsatisfying character of the life of iridescent revery, when he completely recreated his style so as to make it solid, homely and exact where it had formerly been shimmering or florid—the need for dwelling with part of his mind—or with his mind for part of the time—in a world of pure imagination, where the necessities of the real world do not hold, had, none the less, not been conjured away by the new artistic and intellectual habits he was cultivating. Where the early Yeats had studied Irish folk-lore, collected and sorted Irish fairy tales, invented fairy tales for himself, the later Yeats worked out from the mediumistic communications of his wife the twenty-eight phases of the human personality and the transformations of the soul after death. Yeats's sense of reality to-day is inferior to that of no man alive—indeed, his greatness is partly due precisely to the vividness of that sense. In his poetry, in his criticism and in his memoirs, it is the world we all live in with which we are confronted—the world we know, with all its frustrations, its defeats, its antagonisms and its errors—the mind that sees is not naïve, as the heart that feels is not insensitive. They meet reality with comprehension and with passion—but they have phases, we are astonished to discover, when they do not seem to meet it at all. Yet the scientific criticism of supernatural phenomena is actually as much a part of the reality of Yeats's world as it is of that of most of the rest of us. And when Yeats writes of his supernatural experiences, this criticism, though it may

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be kept in the background, is nevertheless always present—his realistic sense is too strong, his intellectual integrity too high, to leave it out of the picture. Though he is much addicted to these fantastic imaginings, though he no doubt needs their support to enable him to sustain his rôle of great poet—yet when he comes to write about his spirits and their messages, he cannot help letting us in on the imposture. He believes, but—he does not believe: the impossibility of believing is the impossibility which he accepts most reluctantly, but still it is there with the other impossibilities of this world which is too full of weeping for a child to understand.

It is interesting to compare "A Vision" with that other compendious treatise on human nature and destiny by that other great writer from Dublin: Bernard Shaw's "Guide to Socialism and Capitalism." Here we can see unmistakably the differences between the kind of literature which was fashionable before the War and the kind which has been fashionable since. Shaw and Yeats, both coming as young men to London from eighteenth-century Dublin, followed diametrically opposite courses. Shaw shouldered the whole unwieldy load of contemporary sociology, politics, economics, biology, medicine and journalism, while Yeats, convinced that the world of science and politics was somehow fatal to the poet's vision, as resolutely turned away. Shaw accepted the scientific technique and set himself to master the problems of an industrial democratic society, while Yeats rejected the methods of Naturalism and applied himself to the introspective plumbing of the

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mysteries of the individual mind. While Yeats was editing Blake, Shaw was grappling with Marx; and Yeats was appalled by Shaw's hardness and efficiency. "I hated it," he says of "Arms and the Man"; "it seemed to me inorganic, logical straightness and not the crooked road of life and I stood aghast before its energy." And he tells us that Shaw appeared to him in a dream in the form of a sewing machine, "that clicked and shone, but the incredible thing was that the machine smiled, smiled perpetually."

In his Great Wheel of the twenty-eight phases, Yeats has situated Shaw at a phase considerably removed from his own, and where the individual is headed straight for the deformity of seeking, not the soul, but the world. And their respective literary testaments—the "Vision" and the "Guide"—published almost at the same time, mark the extreme points of their divergence: Shaw bases all human hope and happiness on an equal distribution of income, which he believes will finally make impossible even the pessimism of a Swift or a Voltaire; while Yeats, like Shaw a Protestant for whom the Catholic's mysticism was impossible, has in "A Vision" made the life of humanity contingent on the movements of the stars. "The day is far off," he concludes, "when the two halves of man can divine each its own unity in the other as in a mirror, Sun in Moon, Moon in Sun, and so escape out of the Wheel."

IV

Yet, in the meantime, the poet Yeats has passed into a sort of third phase, in which he is closer to the common world than at any previous period. He is no longer quite so haughty, so imperturbably astride his high horse, as during his middle Dantesque period. With the Dantesque mask, he has lost something of intensity and something of sharpness of outline. In "The Tower" (1928), certain words such as "bitter," "wild," and "fierce," which he was able, a few years ago, to use with such thrilling effect, have no longer quite the same force. He writes more loosely, and seems to write more easily. He has become more plain-spoken, more humorous—his mind seems to run more frankly on his ordinary human satisfactions and chagrins: he is sometimes harsh, sometimes sensual, sometimes careless, sometimes coarse.

Though he now inhabits, like Michael Robartes, a lonely tower on the outermost Irish coast, he has spent six years in the Irish senate, presiding at official receptions in a silk hat, inspecting the plumbing of the government schools and conscientiously sitting through the movies which it is one of his official duties to censor. He is much occupied with politics and society, with general reflections on human life—but with the wisdom of the experience of a lifetime, he is passionate even in age. And he writes poems which charge now with the emotion of a great lyric poet that profound and subtle criticism of life of which I have spoken in connection with his prose.

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We may take, as an example of Yeats's later vein, the fine poem in "The Tower" called "Among School Children." The poet, now "a sixty year old smiling public man," has paid an official visit to a girls' school kept by nuns; and as he gazes at the children there, he remembers how the woman he had loved had told him once of some "harsh reproof or trivial event" of her girlhood which had changed "some childish day to tragedy." And for a moment the thought that she may once have looked like one of the children before him has revived the excitement of his old love. He remembers the woman in all her young beauty—and thinks of himself with his present sixty years—"a comfortable kind of old scarecrow." What use is philosophy now?—is not all beauty bound up with the body and doomed to decay with it?—is not even the divine beauty itself which is worshipped there by the nuns inseparable from the images of it they adore?

"Labor is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

Here the actual scene in the convent, the personal emotions it awakens and the general speculations which these emotions suggest, have been interwoven and made to play upon each other at the same time that they are kept sepa-

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rate and distinct. A complex subject has been treated in the most concentrated form, and yet without confusion. Perceptions, fancies, feelings and thoughts have all their place in the poet's record. It is a moment of human life, masterfully seized and made permanent, in all its nobility and lameness, its mystery and actuality, its direct personal contact and abstraction.

III

PAUL VALÉRY

PAUL VALÉRY first met Mallarmé in 1892, when Valéry was twenty-one: he became thereafter one of the most faithful and serious of Mallarmé's disciples. Valéry wrote little at this time and did not even collect his verses in a book; yet the Symbolists of what was then the younger generation seem to have acknowledged his supremacy from the beginning. What we find in these poems to-day is chiefly the chaste-celestial, the blue-and-white mood of such poems of Mallarmé's as "Apparition" in what seems a thinner diluted form. Paul Valéry, like his master, is "haunted" by the "azure"; but that azure is less a pure blue realm and more a rarefied upper air. Here and there in these early poems, however, the later Valéry is plainly recognizable: it is his characteristic interest in method apart from matter which leads him to publish two versions of the same sonnet; and in the uncompleted "Profusion du Soir," perhaps the most remarkable of these poems, by a confusion peculiar to Valéry the sunset which the poet is watching is assimilated to his state of mind until it seems sometimes only a set of images for a complex of emotions and thoughts.

Valéry has given us a curious description of his attitude toward Mallarmé at this time:

"When I began to see Mallarmé, I had almost entirely

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lost my interest in literature. Reading and writing were becoming dull work for me, and I confess that they still bore me a little. The study of myself for its own sake, the comprehension of that attention itself and the desire to trace clearly for myself the nature of my own existence, almost never abandoned me. This secret disease alienates one from letters, despite the fact that it has its source in them.

“Mallarmé figured, however, in my private system as the representative of the most accomplished art, as the highest phase of the loftiest literary ambition. In a deep sense, I had his mind for a companion, and I hoped that, despite the difference in our ages, and the immense disparity of our gifts, the day would come when I should not be afraid to lay before him my difficulties and my special ideas. It was not in the least that he intimidated me, for no one was ever more kindly or more charmingly simple than he; but I felt, at that time, a sort of contrast between the practice of literature and the pursuit of a certain rigor and of a complete intellectual sincerity. The question is infinitely delicate. Should I attempt to induce Mallarmé to discuss it? I was fond of him and valued him above everybody, but I myself had renounced the adoration of that which he had adored all his life, and to which he had offered up everything, and I could not bring myself to let him know it.

“I could, however, see no more genuine homage than to lay my thought before him, and to show him how much his researches, and the very fine and precise analysis

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from which they proceeded, had in my eyes transformed the literary problem and had led me to give up the game. The point was that Mallarmé's efforts, which were quite opposed to the doctrines and aims of his contemporaries, were tending to order the whole domain of letters through the general consideration of forms. It is remarkable in the extreme that, through the exhaustive study of his art and with no scientific education, he should have arrived at a conception so abstract and so close to the most abstruse speculations of certain of the sciences. He never discussed his ideas except figuratively. Explaining anything explicitly was strangely repugnant to him. His profession, which he detested, counted for something in that aversion. But, in attempting to sum up to myself his tendencies, I allowed myself to formulate them in my own way. Ordinary literature seemed to me comparable to an *arithmetic*, that is to say, to an attempt to obtain particular results in which it was difficult to distinguish the principle from the example: but the kind of literature which he had conceived seemed to me analogous to an *algebra*, for it assumed the intention to emphasize, to conserve and to develop the forms of which language is capable.

"But from the moment, I said to myself, that a principle has been recognized and grasped by someone, it is quite useless to waste one's time applying it. . . .

"The day I was awaiting never came."

Mallarmé died in 1898. But Paul Valéry had already passed through a personal crisis as a result of which he had ceased to write verse. This moral and intellectual crisis

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was precipitated, Valéry Larbaud tells us, by an unhappy love affair. Through sleepless nights Valéry struggled with his emotions: "the will was driven back on itself, schooled itself to leap clear, to break idols, to free itself, at no matter what cost, from those falsehoods: literature and sentiment. The supreme crisis, the costly victory took place during a stormy night—one of those storms of the Ligurian coast [he was at Genoa] which are not accompanied by very much rain, but during which the lightning is so frequent and so bright that it gives the illusion of broad daylight. From that night none of the things which had hitherto made up the life of the young man mattered any longer. He left Montpellier [where he had studied at the university] and went to live in Paris, where he would be able, when he chose, to shut himself away in solitude, in order to give himself up to that 'penetration of himself,' which has now become his only concern."

During the twenty years that follow, Valéry works in the Ministry of War and in the Havas news agency, and produces no more verse. The "study of oneself for its own sake, the comprehension of that attention itself and the desire to trace clearly for oneself the nature of one's own existence" is the only thing which interests him now. During these years he writes his "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci" and invents his mythological character, M. Teste. Both Leonardo da Vinci and M. Teste (Mr. Head, a companion creation to Rabelais's Messer Gaster, Mr. Belly) are, for Valéry, symbols of the pure intellect, of the human consciousness turned in upon it-

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self. The mind of Leonardo in itself is something immeasurably greater than any of its manifestations in particular fields of activity—painting, writing, engineering or strategy. Action cramps and impoverishes the mind. For by itself the mind is able to deal with an infinite number of possibilities—it is not constrained by the limitations of a field. The mind by itself is omnipotent. And consequently the method, the theory, of doing anything is more interesting than the thing done. For the method may be applied so much more widely—may be universally applied. When a principle, in fact, “has been recognized and grasped, it is quite useless to waste one’s time applying it.”

And M. Teste, unlike Leonardo, does disdain to apply his method to anything. His whole existence is given up to the examination of his own intellectual processes. He is a symbol of the human consciousness isolated from “all the opinions and intellectual habits which spring from the common life and our external relations with other men,” and disembarrassed of “all the sentiments and ideas which are engendered or excited in man by his misfortunes and his fears, his terrors and his hopes; and not freely by his sheer observations upon the world and upon himself.” M. Teste is, in fact, as his creator admits, frankly a monster. And though he exerts upon us a certain fascination, we resent him—he gives us the creeps. We sympathize with Mme. Teste, who is made uneasy by M. Teste’s preoccupation, by his way of entering a room as if he did not see it, by his addressing her as “Being” or “Thing.”

Yet though she fears him, though she does not understand him, she has never ceased to adore him—she does not envy other women who have married ordinary men. And he, when he awakes from his meditations, sometimes seizes upon her brusquely, as if with relief, appetite and surprise. M. Teste and Mme. Teste are, after all, indispensable to each other.

In 1917, Valéry marries a lady of Mallarmé's circle. And at the end of twenty years, he begins writing again. André Gide has finally persuaded him to allow his early poems to be collected and published, and he has had the idea of adding to them a new poem of from twenty-five to fifty lines—the last, perhaps, which he will ever write. But, in the meantime, during his period of retirement, he has studied psychology, physiology, mathematics—he has become preoccupied with questions of method. "Twenty years without writing verse, without even attempting to write it, almost even without reading any! . . . Then, these problems presenting themselves again; and one's discovering that one did not know one's trade; that the little poems one had written long ago had evaded all the difficulties, suppressed what they did not know how to express; made use of an infantile language." For his new poem, he imposes upon himself "laws, constant requirements, *which constitute its true object*. It is an exercise, indeed—intended as such, and worked and reworked: a production entirely of deliberate effort; and then of a second deliberate effort, whose hard task is to mask the first. He who knows how to read me will read an autobiog-

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raphy, in the form. The *matter* is of small importance."

And this poem, which was to have filled but a page, occupies Valéry for more than four years and runs finally to five hundred and forty verses. At the last moment, when it is just about to be printed (1917), Valéry finds for it the title, "La Jeune Parque." But, in spite of its title, its heroic grand manner and its reverberating alexandrines, "La Jeune Parque" is no conventional French poem on a subject from Greek mythology. Valéry speaks of the "rather monstrous copulation of my system, my methods and my musical exigencies with the classical conventions." And it is certain that this mysterious poem represents a genre which has never appeared in literature before. Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* and his *Faun* are the precursors of Valéry's young Fate: they have already a certain ambiguity and seem at moments less imaginary personages than names attached to metaphysical reveries. But Valéry has carried the subtleties of conception, the complexities of presentation, of this characteristically Symbolist form much further than Mallarmé. Is "La Jeune Parque" the monologue of a young Fate, who has just been bitten by a snake? Is it the reverie of the poet himself, awakening early one morning in bed and lying more or less awake till dawn? Is it the voyage of the human consciousness testing out all its limitations, exploring all its horizons: love, solitary thought, action, sleep, death?—the drama of the mind which would withdraw from the world and rise superior to it but which is inevitably pulled back into life and involved in the processes of nature? It is all of

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these—yet the various strata, “physical, psychological and esoteric,” as Francis de Miomandre describes them, are not overlaid one upon the other as in a conventional allegory or fable. They are confused and are always melting into one another—and it is this which makes the obscurity of the poem. The things that happen in “La Jeune Parque” and in Paul Valéry’s other mythological monologues—the Narcissus, the Pythoness and the Serpent of the rich period of poetic activity which followed immediately upon “La Jeune Parque”—are never, on the one hand, quite imaginable as incidents which are actually taking place and never, on the other hand, quite reducible merely to thoughts in the poet’s mind. The picture never quite emerges; the idea is never formulated quite. And for all the magnificences of sound, color, and suggestion which we find in these poems stanza by stanza, it seems to me that they are unsatisfactory because they are somehow not assimilable as wholes.

Yet Paul Valéry, when we put him beside Mallarmé, whom he echoes in these poems so often, is seen to possess the more vigorous intellect and the more solid imagination. Mallarmé is always a painter, usually a water-colorist—he wrote verses for ladies’ fans as he might have painted little figures and flowers on them. He has his brightness and relief, but it is only such brightness and relief as is possible to someone working in the flat—whereas Valéry’s genius is sculptural rather: these mythological poems have a density of cloud-shapes heavily massed—if they were not clouds, we should call them marmoreal. He

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gives us figures and groups half disengaged—and he runs to effects less of color than of light: the silvery, the sombre, the sunny, the translucent, the crystalline. And his verses carry off with the emphasis of an heroic resounding diction reminiscent of Alfred de Vigny the fluid waverings, the coy ambiguities and the delicately caught nuances which he has learned from Mallarmé. If Mallarmé was to supply subjects for Debussy, Valéry, outliving Debussy's vogue, was to be inspired in "La Jeune Parque" by Gluck. Valéry is, indeed, a sort of masculine of an art of which Mallarmé is the feminine. The elements in Mallarmé which made it possible for him to edit a woman's magazine and to write with his characteristic daintiness about styles in women's clothes is complemented, in Valéry, by a genius more powerful and stout which has a natural affinity with that of the architect.

And there is more substance in Valéry than in Mallarmé. In spite of his insistence that it is only the form, only the method in his work which interests him, Valéry's poetry has a certain dramatic quality. He is preoccupied with a particular conflict—the conflict between that part of man's existence which is represented by the abstraction of M. Teste and that part which is submerged in the sensations, distracted by the accidents, of the everyday world. If one were to read only "M. Teste"—though M. Teste is presented with some humor—or if one were to read only Valéry's prose, one might take him for one of the driest and one of the most relentlessly abstract of minds. And it is true that the point of view of M. Teste figures con-

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spicuously in the poetry of Valéry, as it predominates in his prose—that none of his characters is ever allowed to have a life independent of the intellectual world where at any moment he may appear as an abstraction, and that we suspect Valéry of preferring to human subjects, or at least of finding more satisfactory, the marble columns and stately palms which he makes the heroes of certain of his poems. It is true that even in love he tends to seek to suspend sensual satisfaction and keep his mistress in the timeless imminence which is for him a rival satisfaction—begging the woman in “Les Pas” not to hasten, for he enjoys awaiting her as much as her kiss, and making his Serpent say to Eve, when she is on the point of tasting the fruit of the tree:

“Que si ta bouche fait un rêve,
Cette soif qui songe à la sève,
Ce délice à demi futur,
C’est l’éternité fondante, Eve!”

He seems, in fact, to prefer women asleep, or fatigued, because he can think of them then, as in “Dormeuse,” as forms of pure abstraction, from which the personality has departed, or because he can reflect, as in “La Fausse Morte,” that the satiety of love is a kind of death; he likes to imagine them, as in “Intérieur,” insubstantial transparent presences who pass before the eyes of the mind like glass through the beams of the sun. Yet there has perhaps never been a poet who enjoyed the sensuous world with more gusto than Valéry or who more solidly bodied it forth. In

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the reproduction, in beautiful verses, of shapes, sounds, effects of light and shadow, substances of fruit or flesh, Valéry has never been surpassed. Of the summer cicada, he writes:

“L’insecte net gratte la sécheresse” . . .

of a cemetery by the sea:

“Où tant de marbre est tremblant sur tant d’ombres” . . .

of the pool of Narcissus, when it is evening in the forest—
“une tendre lueur d’heure ambiguë existe”—and the water is smooth as a mirror:

“Onde déserte, et digne
Sur son lustre, du lisse effacement d’un cygne” . . .

of a rough sea:

“Si l’âme intense souffle, et renfle furibonde
L’onde abrupte sur l’onde abbatue, et si l’onde
Au cap tonne, immolant un monstre de candeur,
Et vient des hautes mers vomir la profondeur
Sur ce roc” . . .

And his human figures are like heroic statues which have yet a vibrancy and a soft envelopment. His *Serpent* puts before us an Eve of Michael Angelo:

“Calme, claire, de charmes lourde,
Je dominais furtivement,
L’œil dans l’or ardent de ta laine,
Ta nuque énigmatique et pleine
Des secrets de ton mouvement!”

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And later, when she is tempted:

“Le marbre aspire, l’or se cambre!
Ces blondes bases d’ombre et d’ambre
Tremblent au bord du mouvement!”

And in one marvellous line of “Dormeuse,” he reveals a whole recumbent figure:

“Ta forme au ventre pur qu’un bras fluide drape.”

Valéry’s poetry is then always shifting back and forth between this palpable and visible world and a realm of intellectual abstraction. And the contrast between them, the conflict implied between the absolute laws of the mind and the limiting contingencies of life, opposites impossible to dissociate from one another, is, as I say, the real subject of his poems. Rather an unpromising subject, one might suppose—one, at any rate, entirely remote from the emotions of Romantic poetry. Yet this queer antagonism has inspired Valéry to some of the most original poetry ever written, to some of the indubitably great poetry of our time. We may take as an example of this theme treated on Valéry’s full scale his most popular and perhaps most satisfactory poem, “Le Cimetière Marin,” which celebrates Valéry’s return to poetry after his long period of inactivity. Here the poet has stopped at noon beside a graveyard by the sea: the sun seems to stand still above him; the water looks as level as a roof on which the boats are doves walking. The external world at the moment seems to figure that absolute toward which Valéry

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is always turning, with which he has been for so many years obsessed. Yet, "O Noonday!" he cries, "for all your immobility, I am the secret change in you—I am the flaw in your enormous diamond!"— But the dead, there below, they have gone to join the void—they have become a part of inanimate nature. And suppose he himself, the living man, has, alive, merely the illusion of movement—like the runner or the arrow of Zeno's paradoxes?—"But no!" he exhorts himself. "Break up that brooding, that immobility, which has all but absorbed you!" The salt wind is already rising to break up the tranquil roof of the sea, and to dash it against the rocks. The world enters into movement again and the poet must go back to life!

It is quite impossible, however, in other language, to provide a scenario for one of Valéry's poems: in doing so, one must leave out almost all that is most characteristic of Valéry. In trying to clear up his meaning, one clears it up too much. The truth is that there are no real ideas, no real general reflections, in such a poem as "Le Cimetière Marin": Valéry presents, even more completely than Yeats in such a poem as "Among School Children," the emotion merged with the idea and both embedded in the scene where they have occurred. It is the aim and the triumph of the Symbolist poet to make the stabilities of the external world answer to the individual's varying apprehension of them. It is, indeed, his effect, if not his purpose, to lead us to question the traditional dualism which would make them out to be two separate things. In such a poem as "Le Cimetière Marin," there is no simple sec-

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ond meaning: there is a marvellously close reproduction of the very complex and continually changing relation of human consciousness to the things of which it is conscious. The noonday is inorganic Nature, but it is also the absolute in the poet's mind, it is also his twenty years of inaction—and it is also merely the noonday itself, which in a moment will no longer exist, which will be no longer either tranquil or noon. And the sea, which, during those moments of calm, forms a part of that great diamond of nature in which the poet finds himself the single blemish, because the single change, is also the image of the poet's silence, which in a moment, as the wind comes up to lash the sea, will give way to a sudden gust of utterance, the utterance of the poem itself. World and poet are always overlapping, are always interpenetrating, as they might in a Romantic poem; but the Symbolist will not even try, as the Romantic would be likely to do, to keep their relations consistent. The conventions of the poem's imagery change as quickly and as naturally as the images passing through the poet's mind.

II

Since "Charmes" (1922), Paul Valéry has published no more poetry, but a good deal of miscellaneous prose. Valéry's prose, in spite of the extravagant respect with which it is treated by his admirers, is by no means so remarkable as his verse. In the first place, it seems doubtful

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whether Valéry has ever really mastered a prose style. There are many admirable things in his essays, passages of a fine terseness, tightness and wit, but the prose is always liable to get snarled in a knot of words which balks the understanding at the same time that it exasperates the taste.

The opacities of Valéry's prose are usually attributed by Valéry's admirers, who in this only follow the intimations of the master himself, to the originality and profundity of his ideas. But the truth is that, when we go through Valéry's essays, we are unable to find many ideas. We find simply, as we do in his poetry, the presentation of intellectual situations, instead of the development of lines of thought. A French critic has already taxed Valéry with being a philosopher who won't philosophize; and it is true that the "rigor" of which he is always talking is rather an artistic effect of his prose, produced by certain devices of style like the artistic effects of his poems, than a quality of his logic. In spite of his passion for method, Valéry seems to have taken singularly little trouble to sort out or set in order his ideas: like M. Teste, he is occupied rather with savoring his intellectual sensations and in coining more or less mixed metaphors to convey them. And though it is possible to a certain extent to share his enjoyment of this pastime, in the long run we find it dreary and even repellent. What, we ask, has Valéry-Teste succeeded in dredging up by that abysmal self-scrutiny of his? Why, not much more than the realization, which he is hardly the first to have arrived

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at, that all forms of intellectual activity—even those which seem on the surface very different: poetry and mathematics, for example—are fundamentally the same sort of thing, merely arrangements or organizations of selected elements of experience. In so far as Valéry really deals in ideas, he is, in fact, a sort of super-dilettante, who, though he has many passages of pungent writing and stimulating insight, is just as likely, with groans of heavy labor, to unload a ponderous platitude. Most of Valéry's reputation for profundity comes, I believe, from the fact that he was one of the first literary men to acquire a smattering of the new mathematical and physical theory. Valéry has, it is true, made interesting use of this, but one wishes sometimes that he would either go further with it or leave philosophy alone. He never seems to have gotten over his first excitement at reading Poincaré, and he is still rather snobbish about it: he is always telling us how difficult it is going to be to make us understand this or that, and then the portentous thought, when it comes, turns out to be one of the commonplaces of modern scientific philosophy—the sort of thing which J. W. N. Sullivan, for example, has had no difficulty in explaining lucidly in the short popular essays of his "Aspects of Science."

As a literary critic, however, Valéry has both interest and importance. He is perhaps the principal exponent in France of a peculiar point of view about poetry which has gained currency with the progress of modern Symbolism. The Romantics thought of a poem as primarily a piece of self-expression—a gushing forth of emotion, a bursting

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into song. The conception fashionable to-day is quite different: the doctrines of Symbolism were in some ways closely analogous to the doctrines of Romanticism, but in this respect the later Symbolists are at the opposite pole from the Romantics. Paul Valéry's attitude toward poetry is both more esoteric and more scientific than that of Romantic criticism.

Valéry had already in 1894, in his "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci," defined a work of art as "a machine intended to excite and combine the individual formations" of a particular "category of minds." And from the time of "La Jeune Parque," he has never ceased to insist that a poem is an intricate intellectual problem, a struggle with self-imposed conditions—that it is, above all, something *constructed*. Or, according to a favorite simile of Valéry's, a poem is like a heavy weight which the poet has carried to the roof bit by bit—the reader is the passer-by upon whom the weight is dropped all at once and who consequently receives from it in a moment an overwhelming impression, a complete æsthetic effect, such as the poet has never known in composing it. "Enthusiasm," says Valéry, "is not an artist's state of mind." And also: "Genius is a habit which certain people acquire." "X wants us to believe that a metaphor is a communication from Heaven. A metaphor is what occurs when one looks at things in a certain way, as getting dazzled is what occurs when one looks into a sun. When one looks at things in what way? You feel it, and some day it will perhaps be possible to explain it in the most precise terms.

Do this and that—and you have all the metaphors in the world.”

This apparently cool and analytic attitude, however, is accompanied, curiously enough, by an excessively esoteric conception of poetry. This conception is most clearly stated and its weakness, it seems to be, made most clearly manifest in a preface which Valéry has just contributed to a commentary on his own “*Charmes*” by the French essayist Alain (this scholastic layer upon layer of commentary is itself very characteristic of the contemporary criticism of poetry). Here we find, as usual, the scientific approach—which it occurs to us, as we read, is largely a matter of scientific similes: “There are certain rather mysterious bodies which physics studies and which chemistry uses: I always think of them when I reflect upon works of art.” These are the catalytic agents, which precipitate chemical changes without being affected themselves. So the work of art, says Valéry, acts upon the mind into which it is introduced. Even when chemically considered, then, the work of art remains something “mysterious.” And by “works of art,” it further appears that, in the department of literature, Valéry means poetry exclusively. Prose, he says, has “sense” for its sole object—but the object of poetry is something not only more mysterious, but also apparently more occult: “There is absolutely no question in poetry of one person’s transmitting to another something intelligible that is going on in his mind. It is a question of creating in the latter a state whose expression is precisely and uniquely that which communi-

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cates it to him. Whatever image or emotion is formed in the amateur of poems, it is valid and sufficient if it produces in him this reciprocal relation between the word-cause and the word-effect. The result is that the reader enjoys a very great freedom in regard to ideas, a freedom analogous to that which one recognizes in the case of the hearer of music, though not so intensive."

It seems to me that a pretense to exactitude is here used to cover a number of ridiculously false assumptions, and to promote a kind of æsthetic mysticism rather than to effect a scientific analysis. In the first place, is it not absurd to assert that prose deals exclusively in "sense" as distinguished from suggestion, and that one has no right to expect from poetry, as Valéry says in another passage, "any definite notion at all"? Is verse really an intellectual product absolutely different in kind from prose? Has it really an absolutely different function? Are not both prose and verse, after all, merely techniques of human intercommunication, and techniques which have played various rôles, have been used for various purposes, in different periods and civilizations? The early Greeks used verse for their histories, their romances and their laws—the Greeks and the Elizabethans used it for their dramas. If Valéry's definitions are correct, what becomes of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe? They all of them deal in sense as well as suggestion and aim to convey "definite notions." These definitions have, however, obviously been framed to apply to the poetry of Valéry himself and of Mallarmé and the other Symbolists. Yet it does not really

apply even to them. As we have seen, Valéry's poetry does make sense, it does deal with definite subjects, it does transmit to us "something intelligible that is going on inside his mind." Even though in calling his book of poems "Charmes," he has tried to emphasize its esoteric, magical, non-utilitarian character, we cannot admit that it is anything but an effort like another of articulate human speech. What happens when we communicate with each other, in literature as well as in curses and cries for help, and in verse as well as in prose—what part is played by "sense" and what part is played by suggestion, and whether sense and suggestion are different and separable—are questions which take us far and deep: I shall return to them in a later chapter. But Valéry has already let us see—it is even one of his favorite ideas—that he understands the basic similarity between the various forms of intellectual activity; he has taken pride in pointing out the kinship between poetry and mathematics. And if the function and methods of poetry are similar to those of mathematics, they must surely be similar to those of prose. If Valéry resembles Descartes, as he seems willingly to indulge himself in imagining, then it is impossible to make a true distinction between a philosophical or mathematical treatise and however Symbolistic a poem. Valéry betrays himself here, it seems to me, as a thinker anything but "rigorous"; and he betrays also, I believe, a desire, defensive no doubt at the same time as snobbish, to make it appear that verse, a technique now no longer much used for history, story-telling or drama and consequently not much

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in popular demand, has some inherent superiority to prose. He has not hesitated even to assure us elsewhere that "poetry is the most difficult of the arts"!

III

With all respect for Valéry's intelligence, for his candor and independence, it must be admitted that he is taken too seriously—and perhaps takes himself too seriously—as a universal sage. "Stupidity is not my forte," he says—and though we are willing to agree, we should prefer not to hear him say it. A great poet, we should prefer not to have him continually explaining what superhuman labor it has cost him to compose his poems and intimating that, in comparison with his own work, the poetry of other poets is mostly facile and superficial—especially when we remember his replying to a correspondent who had complained of some awkward inversion in "La Jeune Parque" that the reader had happened to hit upon precisely one of those passages in the poem which Valéry had "literally improvised in the hasty lassitude of finishing it up."

The pretentious and snobbish side of Valéry was seen at its worst on the occasion of his election to the French Academy, when he succeeded to Anatole France's chair and had to deliver an address upon his predecessor—an incident which is worth dwelling upon, however, because it has a certain historical importance. Valéry behaved on this occasion in a highly unconventional manner. In the first place, it appears that at the Academy the uniforms are

passed on from generation to generation and that a new member fits himself as best he can from such old uniforms as are available—as American college graduates at commencement rent old graduation gowns. Paul Valéry, however, is reported to have astounded the Academicians by appearing in a smart brand-new uniform which he had had made for him by a fashionable tailor. The address on Anatole France which he then read is said to have been received with consternation. It has always been the custom for the newly elected member to compose an “*éloge*” on the man he is succeeding; but, instead of the usual complimentary obituary, Valéry delivered himself of a piece of criticism which can hardly be described as anything less than an attack. Anatole France had been unfriendly to Symbolism in the days when it had been new and unpopular: he had said that he could “never believe in the success of a literary school which expressed difficult thoughts in obscure language.” He had made fun of Mallarmé and spoken contemptuously of Rimbaud. And in his own writing he had represented that French tradition of classical lucidity and simplicity against which the Symbolists were rebelling. Now Paul Valéry is only the second Symbolist to have been admitted to the French Academy, and his election was like a final official recognition of the literary party which had once been outlawed. His funeral sermon on Anatole France is composed in the mood of a none too generous victor, at once complaining and cocky. Valéry adopts the general tone of desiring in a patronizing way to say something kindly and

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appreciative about France, but everything that he says turns out to sound disparaging. He takes up *seriatim* all the charges which have been made against France since his death—such as the meaningless gossip to the effect that, if it had not been for Mme. de Caillavet, he would never have accomplished anything—and, with the air of mitigating their seriousness, somehow succeeds in giving them weight. He speaks of France's "sinuosity" and prudence in such a way as to convey the impression that he was timid and insincere (since, though France had invited popular hatred, had sacrificed his place in the Academy and had embroiled himself with his friends, in defending the innocence of Dreyfus, he had failed to understand and champion Symbolism); and he concludes that, in view of France's humble origins (he was the son of a bookseller on the quais), he had really done very well indeed. Valéry furthermore refrains throughout in a marked and insulting manner from mentioning France's name—a perfectly innocuous pseudonym derived from a family nickname for Anatole-François—and makes upon it the following comment: "He himself would not have been possible, would scarcely have been conceivable, except in France, whose name he assumed. Under that name, so difficult to carry off, and which it required so much assurance to adopt, he won the favor of the universe. He presented it, indeed, with a France possessing all those specious qualities with which, if she herself were to remain satisfied, the universe would suffer; but which were agreeable to him and to which he did not feel any objection." Valéry goes

on to speak at length of France, the nation (Valéry himself is half Italian, and a tendency to think in Italian is evidently at the bottom of some of the peculiarities of his style), and ends his address on a high note of patriotism.

Now one would naturally not expect Paul Valéry to go against his convictions, or even politely to conceal them with evasions, merely because he had happened to succeed to the place of a writer of whom he disapproved. Furthermore, with Valéry's criticisms of France it is partly possible to agree. It is not without reason that Anatole France has come to represent to many French literary people all that is elegantly second-rate in the writing of the previous generation. France was the last great writer of a tradition and in his work the peculiar weaknesses of the tradition became, in consequence, especially conspicuous. It is true that before he died, he had lived long enough to have produced certain books which, for their empty unctuousness and suavity, their mechanical neatness of form, do tend to discourage us rather with Renanian irony and pity and with classical symmetry and clearness. It was time that those formulas should be discarded—there was nothing more to be done along those lines. And Valéry is one of those who have abolished them. Yet, with all faith in the methods of Symbolism, with all enthusiasm for its achievements, as one reads this patronizing and feline paper one cannot help rebelling against what appears to be Valéry's assumption that it is impossible at the same time to be profound and to write as lightly and lucidly as France did. Valéry himself seems deliberately on this oc-

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casion to have avoided writing attractively or clearly: though his subject is not in the least metaphysical, though there is nothing in the least difficult about what he is saying, this address is perhaps his masterpiece of bad writing. Never have Valéry's viscous prose, his masses of clotted abstractions, his hindside-foremost presentations of thought, been managed to worse advantage. To say that the author of "Le Jardin d'Epicure" would have turned in his grave if he could have heard Valéry's paper would be to understate the situation: France's bitterest clerical enemies could have wished him no more horrible punishment than to have had to listen to them in Hell.

In any case, Valéry's advent to the Academy, in suggesting a contrast between Valéry and France, marks even more sharply than the divergence between Yeats and Bernard Shaw the difference between the new methods and attitudes of the typical literature of the period since the War and those of the literature of the period which the War ended. Anatole France was a popular writer: he aimed to be persuasive and intelligible—he used frankly to remind his secretary, Brousson, that they were "working for a bourgeois clientèle. That is the only one that reads. Do not tear away the veil of the temple. Pluck it off a little at a time. Riddle it with sly little holes. . . . Leave to your reader the easy victory of seeing further than you." His books were sold on all the bookstalls of France and known all over the civilized world. Whereas Paul Valéry disregards altogether the taste and intelligence of the ordinary reader: instead of allowing his

reader the easy victory, he takes pride in outstripping him completely. And he is read chiefly by other writers or by people with a special interest in literature: his poems are always out of print and his other writings are always being published in editions so expensive and limited as practically never to circulate at all. Anatole France was voluminous: he supplied his public with a whole literature of romance, history, criticism, satire, drama, poetry, philosophy, political pamphlets, newspaper articles and speeches. Paul Valéry publishes little: his whole genius has been concentrated to the production of a few magnificent poems—beyond these, he has written almost nothing but a few volumes of miscellaneous notes. Anatole France was essentially a rationalist: he did not deny the incongruities and incoherences of experience, but he attempted to write about them, at least, in a simple, logical and harmonious style. Paul Valéry has set himself, on the contrary, the task of reproducing by his very language all the complexities and confusions of our interacting sensations and ideas. The phenomena with which France usually deals are the events of life as it is lived in the world; with Valéry the object of interest is the isolated or ideal human mind, brooding on its own contradictions or admiring its own flights. When France turns away from literature, he occupies himself naturally with politics—he goes on the stump for Dreyfus, allies himself with the Socialist party, writes editorials for its paper, addresses meetings of working men and finally declares himself a Communist. But Valéry concerns himself little with politics, and then only

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as a detached intelligence—his extra-literary pursuits are scientific. And whereas for France, science meant exclusively a conventional nineteenth-century mechanism, with which he had become so deeply imbued that he was haunted all his life by nightmares of the dizziness of space, the extinction of the sun, the fatally automatic character of human loves and ambitions, the reversion of mankind to barbarism through a reversal of the evolutionary process—Paul Valéry has emerged into an era when the scientific point of view no longer implies this determinism. (France's attitude toward modern science was like his attitude toward Symbolism: when in his old age he met Einstein in Berlin and Einstein tried to explain to him his theories, France had no patience to listen: "When he told me that light was matter, my head began to swim and I took my leave.") For the modern scientific thought which colors Valéry's speculations has extricated itself from the conception of ineluctable laws of nature, relentless chains of cause and effect. Valéry discusses in one of his most interesting essays the oppression and panic felt by Pascal at his vision—a typically seventeenth-century vision of the scientific imagination—of the silent abysses of space. Such imaginings drove a Pascal into fanatical piety—the equivalent conceptions of two centuries later drove France to a habit of despair which came largely to counteract and invalidate his hopes for human society. To Pascal and France alike, man seemed ignominious and insignificant. But Valéry can laugh at both: he has caught already the first lights of an age in which

our increasing knowledge of the universe will have come to change "not merely our ideas, but certain of our immediate reactions" and "what one might call 'Pascal's reaction' will be a rarity and a curiosity to psychologists." Man is no longer to be a tiny exile, pitting himself amidst vast space against matter: what he has been thinking of as his soul, the exclusive possession of human beings, is somehow bound up with that external nature which he has been regarding as inanimate or alien, and his mind, which has lately seemed as feeble as a spark of phosphorescence on a midnight ocean, turns out to have constructed its own universe.

It is particularly illuminating to compare Valéry's M. Teste with France's most celebrated creation, M. Bergeret of the "*Histoire Contemporaine*." M. Bergeret is a social being, polite, agreeable and fond of company: though sadly harassed in the community where he lives by many elements which he feels to be hostile or undesirable, the common interests of that community and of the civilization it represents are what he has chiefly at heart. He is always discussing this civilization with his neighbors, and when an important political issue arises, he is positive and prompt to take sides. But M. Teste is outside society, he has almost succeeded in dissociating himself from human relations altogether: "He neither smiled, nor said good-day nor good-bye; and seemed not to hear one's how-do-you-do"—he goes to bed and goes to sleep in the presence of a guest, and his effect on Mme. Teste is to make her feel that she is non-existent. He is ill-mannered, self-preoccu-

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pied, austere—the modern psychologists would probably diagnose him as introverted, narcissistic and manic depressive.

And in general it may be said that the strength of Anatole France's generation was the strength to be derived from a wide knowledge of human affairs, a sympathetic interest in human beings, direct contact with public opinion and participation in public life through literature. The strength of solitary labor and of earnest introspection is the strength of Valéry's.

IV

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I HAVE noted the similarity between the English seventeenth-century poets and the French nineteenth-century Symbolists. The poetry of T. S. Eliot has, in our own time, brought together these two traditions, as it is Eliot who, so far as I know, has for the first time called attention to their resemblance. "The form," he says, "in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909, was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama; and I do not know anyone who started from exactly that point."

I have so far, in discussing the early Symbolists, spoken chiefly of Mallarmé. But T. S. Eliot derived, as he indicates, from a different branch of the Symbolist tradition. In 1873 there had appeared in Paris a book of poems called "Les Amours Jaunes," by a writer who signed himself Tristan Corbière. "Les Amours Jaunes" was received with complete indifference, and scarcely more than a year after it appeared, the author died of consumption. Only thirty at the time of his death, Tristan Corbière had been an eccentric and very maladjusted man: he was the son of a sea captain who had also written sea stories and he had had an excellent education, but he chose for himself the

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life of an outlaw. In Paris, he slept all day and spent the nights in the cafés or at his verses, greeting at dawn the Paris harlots as they emerged from the station house or the hotel with the same half-harsh, half-tender fellow-feeling for the exile from conventional society which, when he was at home in his native Brittany, caused him to flee the house of his family and seek the company of the customs-men and sailors—living skeleton and invalid as he was, performing prodigies of courage and endurance in the navigation of a little cutter which he sailed by preference in the worst possible weather. He made a pose of his unsociability and of what he considered his physical ugliness, at the same time that he undoubtedly suffered over them. Melancholy, with a feverishly active mind, full of groanings and vulgar jokes, he used to amuse himself by going about in convict's clothes and by firing guns and revolvers out the window in protest against the singing of the village choir; and on one occasion, on a visit to Rome, he appeared in the streets in evening dress, with a mitre on his head and two eyes painted on his forehead, leading a pig decorated with ribbons. And Corbière's poetry was a poetry of the outcast: often colloquial and homely, yet with a rhetoric of fantastic slang; often with the manner of slapdash doggerel, yet sure of its own morose artistic effects; full of the parade of romantic personality, yet incessantly humiliating itself with a self-mockery scurrilous and savage, out of which, as Huysmans said, would sometimes rise without warning "a cry of sharp pain like the breaking of a 'cello string"—Corbière's verse

brought back into French poetry qualities which had been alien to its spirit since François Villon's day.

So outlandish did Corbière appear even from the point of view of the Romantics that he was dismissed, when he was noticed at all, as not merely unseemly but insane—till Paul Verlaine, in 1883, did him honor in a series of articles, "Les Poètes Maudits," which was one of the important critical events in the development of Symbolism. Verlaine himself, a more accomplished artist, but a less original and interesting personality, had been strongly influenced by "Les Amours Jaunes"—he seems, indeed, to have caught over from Corbière, not only certain artistic effects, but even something of his own poetic personality, his peculiar accent of wistful naïveté: compare Corbière's "Rondels pour Après" with Verlaine's sonnet which begins, "L'espoir luit comme un brin de paille dans l'étable"; or "Paria" with "Casper Hauser."

But another French poet, Jules Laforgue, nineteen years younger than Corbière, had independently developed a tone and technique—poignant-ironic, grandiose-slangy, scurrilous-naïve—which had much in common with Corbière's. Laforgue was the son of a schoolmaster and, for all his nonchalance in handling rudely the conventions of French poetry, much more a professional man of letters than Corbière. Laforgue even errs through preciousness in his fashion; what with Corbière seems a personal and inevitable, if eccentric, manner of speech, in Laforgue sounds self-conscious and deliberate, almost sometimes a literary exercise. He was tubercular, as Corbière was also,

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and dead at twenty-seven—and his gentleness and sadness are still those of a sick well-cared-for child; his asperities, his surprising images, his coqueties, his cynicism, and his impudence, are still those of a clever schoolboy. Laforgue's friends procured him a post as reader to the Empress Augusta of Germany; and, falling under the spell of German philosophy, he brought its jargon into his verse, contributing thereby to Symbolism perhaps the one element of obscurity which it had lacked.

Yet Laforgue is a very fine poet and one of the most remarkable of the Symbolists. He and Corbière had introduced a new variety of vocabulary and a new flexibility of feeling. With Mallarmé, it may be said that, on the whole, it is the imagery, not the feeling, which is variable: though sometimes playful, he is classical in the sense (as Yeats and Valéry are) that he sustains a certain grandeur of tone. But it is from the conversational-ironic, rather than from the serious-æsthetic, tradition of Symbolism that T. S. Eliot derives. Corbière and Laforgue are almost everywhere in his early work. The emphatic witty quatrains of Corbière, with their sudden lapses into tenderness or pathos, are heard again in the satiric verse of Eliot: a poem like "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" would hardly, one imagines, have been written without Corbière's "Rapsodie Foraine." And as "Conversation Galante" derives clearly from certain poems in Laforgue's "Complaintes" and "Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune," so the more elaborate "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" follow closely the longer poems of La-

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forgue. Compare the conclusion of "Mr. Prufrock" with the conclusion of the early version of Laforgue's poem "Légende":

"I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach!
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach,
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown."

. . .

"Hier l'orchestre attaquait
Sa dernière polka

Oh! L'automne, l'automne!
Les casinos
Qu'on abandonne
Remisent leurs pianos! . . .

Phrases, verroteries,
Caillots de souvenirs.
Oh! comme elle est maigrie!
Que vais-je devenir? . . .

Adieu! Les filles d'ifs dans les grisailles
Ont l'air de pleureuses de funérailles
Sous l'autan noir qui veut que tout s'en aille.

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Assez, assez,
C'est toi qui as commencé.

Va, ce n'est plus l'odeur de tes fourrures.
Va, vos moindres clins d'yeux sont des parjures.
Tais-toi, avec vous autres rien ne dure.

Tais-toi, tais-toi,
On n'aime qu'une fois" . . .

Here it will be seen that Eliot has reproduced Laforgue's irregular metrical scheme almost line for line. Furthermore, the subject of Laforgue's poem—the hesitations and constraints of a man either too timid or too disillusioned to make love to a woman who provokes his ironic pity at the same time that she stirs gusts of stifled emotion—has a strong resemblance to the subjects of "Mr. Prufrock" and the "Portrait of a Lady." And in another poem, "La Figlia Che Piange," Eliot has adapted a line of Laforgue's: "Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour"—"Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand." He has even brought over into English some of the unstressed effect of French verse: how different, for example, is the alexandrine of Eliot's just quoted from the classical English alexandrine "which like a wounded snake drags its slow length along" or "with sparkless ashes loads an unlamented urn." (In his exhaustive "Influence du Symbolisme Français sur la Poésie Américaine de 1910 à 1920," M. René Taupin has shown the influence of Gautier also in Eliot's satiric poems: "The Hippopotamus," it appears, is almost a transcript of a hippopotamus by Gautier, and

the "Grishkin is nice" passage in "Whispers of Immortality" repeats a "Carmen est maigre" of Gautier.)

It must not be supposed, however, that Eliot is not original or that he is not the equal of either of his masters. Those longer and more elaborate poems—"Derniers Vers" in the collected edition—which Laforgue was constructing at the time of his death out of more fragmentary and less mature work are certainly his most important performances: through his masterly flexibility of vocabulary and metric, he has here achieved one of the definitive expressions of the pathetic-ironic, wordly-æsthetic moods of the *fin de siècle* temperament. Yet, though Eliot has, in certain obvious respects, applied Laforgue's formula so faithfully, he cannot properly be described as an imitator because he is in some ways a superior artist. He is more mature than Laforgue ever was, and his workmanship is perfect in a way that Corbière's and Laforgue's were rarely. T. S. Eliot's peculiar distinction lies, as Clive Bell has said, in his "phrasing." Laforgue's images are often far-fetched and inappropriately grotesque: his sins in this respect are really very closely akin to those of the English metaphysical poets; but Eliot's taste is absolutely sure—his images always precisely right. And the impression that Eliot leaves, even in these earliest poems, is clear, vivid and unforgettable: we do not subordinate him to his Symbolist predecessors any more than, when we find him, as in "Gerontion," writing in the rhythms of late Elizabethan blank-verse, we associate him with Middleton or Webster.

When we come to examine Eliot's themes, we recognize

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something which we have found already in Laforgue, but which appears in Eliot in a more intense form. One of the principal preoccupations of Flaubert—a great hero of Eliot's, as of Eliot's fellow-poet, Ezra Pound's—had been the inferiority of the present to the past: the Romantics had discovered the possibilities of the historical imagination; with their thirst for boldness, grandeur, and magnificence, they had located these qualities in past epochs—especially the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. And Flaubert, who shared with the Romantics this appetite for the gorgeous and the untamed, but who constrained himself, also, to confront the actual nineteenth-century world, pursued two parallel lines of fiction which lent significance and relief to each other. On the one hand, he reconstructed, in "Salammbô" and in "La Tentation de Saint-Antoine," the splendid barbarities of the pagan world and the heroic piety of the early Christian; and on the other, he caricatured, in "Madame Bovary," in "L'Education Sentimentale" and in "Bouvard et Pécuchet," the pusillanimity and mediocrity of contemporary bourgeois France. This whole point of view of Flaubert's—summed up, as it were, in "Trois Contes," where the three periods are contrasted in one book—was profoundly to affect modern literature. We shall find it later on in Joyce; but in the meantime we must note its reappearance in the poetry of Eliot. Eliot, like Flaubert, feels at every turn that human life is now ignoble, sordid or tame, and he is haunted and tormented by intimations that it has once been otherwise. In "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein

with a Cigar," the young American tourist in Venice, superseded in his affair with the Princess Volupine by a vulgar Austrian Jew, meditates on the clipped wings and pared claws of the Lion of St. Mark's, the symbol of the old arrogant Venice and of the world where such a city was possible. In "A Cooking Egg," the poet demands, after a call upon a very mild, dull spinster: "Where are the eagles and the trumpets?" and himself returns the saddened answer: "Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps." In "Lune de Miel," the Middle Western American travellers, stifled with the summer heat and devoured by the bedbugs of Ravenna, are contrasted with the noble crumbling beauty of the old Byzantine church less than a league away, of which they are totally unaware and to which they have apparently no relation; and in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," the combined grossness and aridity of the modern clergymen is contrasted with the pure and fresh religious feeling of a picture of the baptism of Christ by "a painter of the Umbrian school." In the best and most effective of these poems, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," the poet, during a drowsy, idiotic and mildly sinister scene in some low dive, where two of the girls are supposed to be plotting against one of the men, remembers, at the sound of nightingales singing, the murder of Agamemnon in Æschylus:

"The host with someone indistinct
 Converses at the door apart,
 The nightingales are singing near
 The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

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And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud,
And let their liquid siftings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud."

The present is more timid than the past: the bourgeois are afraid to let themselves go. The French had been preoccupied with this idea ever since the first days of Romanticism; but Eliot was to deal with the theme from a somewhat different point of view, a point of view characteristically American. For T. S. Eliot, though born in St. Louis, comes from a New England family and was educated at Harvard; and he is in some ways a typical product of our New England civilization. He is distinguished by that combination of practical prudence with moral idealism which shows itself in its later developments as an excessive fastidiousness and scrupulousness. One of the principal subjects of Eliot's poetry is really that regret at situations unexplored, that dark rankling of passions inhibited, which has figured so conspicuously in the work of the American writers of New England and New York from Hawthorne to Edith Wharton. T. S. Eliot, in this respect, has much in common with Henry James. Mr. Prufrock and the poet of the "Portrait of a Lady," with their helpless consciousness of having dared too little, correspond exactly to the middle-aged heroes of "The Ambassadors" and "The Beast in the Jungle," realizing sadly too late in life that they have been living too cautiously and too poorly. The fear of life, in Henry James, is closely bound up with the fear of vulgarity. And Eliot, too, fears vul-

garity—which he embodies in the symbolic figure of “Apeneck Sweeney”—at the same time that he is fascinated by it. Yet he chafes at the limitations and pretenses of the culture represented by Boston—a society “quite uncivilized,” as he says, “but refined beyond the point of civilization.” He has some amusing satiric poems about old New England ladies—in one of which he reflects on his way to the house of his Cousin Harriet, how

“ . . . evening quickens faintly in the street,
Wakening the appetites of life in some
And to others bringing the *Boston Evening Transcript*.”

And the “Portrait of a Lady,” whether the scene be laid in Boston or in London, is essentially a poem of that New England society “refined beyond the point of civilization”: from the Lady, who serves tea among lighted candles—“an atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb”—with her dampening efforts at flattery and flirtation through the medium of cultured conversation—her slightly stale and faded gush about Chopin and her memories of Paris in the spring—the poet is seized with an impulse to flee:

“I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends
For what she has said to me?
You will see me any morning in the park
Reading the comics and the sporting page.
Particularly I remark
An English countess goes upon the stage,
A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
Another bank defaulter has confessed.
I keep my countenance,

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I remain self-possessed
Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired,
Reiterates some worn-out common song
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
Recalling things that other people have desired."

But he is always debating things with his conscience: his incurable moral solicitude makes him wonder:

"Are these ideas right or wrong?"

So Mr. Prufrock in the room where

". . . women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo,"

wistfully asks himself:

"Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?" . . .

And Mr. Prufrock wonders also whether he should not put a question to his lady—but he never gets to the point of putting it.

II

But Eliot's most complete expression of this theme of emotional starvation is to be found in the later and longer poem called "The Waste Land" (1922). The Waste Land of the poem is a symbol borrowed from the myth of the Holy Grail: it is a desolate and sterile country ruled by an impotent king, in which not only have the crops ceased to

grow and the animals to reproduce, but the very human inhabitants have become incapable of having children. But this sterility we soon identify as the sterility of the Puritan temperament. On the first pages we find again the theme of the girl with the hyacinths (themselves a symbol for the rearsen god of the fertility rites who will save the rainless country from drouth) which has already figured in "La Figlia Che Piange" and "Dans le Restaurant"—a memory which apparently represents for the poet some fulfillment foregone in youth and now agonizingly desired; and in the last pages it is repeated. We recognize throughout "The Waste Land" the peculiar conflicts of the Puritan turned artist: the horror of vulgarity and the shy sympathy with the common life, the ascetic shrinking from sexual experience and the distress at the drying up of the springs of sexual emotion, with the straining after a religious emotion which may be made to take its place.

Yet though Eliot's spiritual and intellectual roots are still more firmly fixed in New England than is, I believe, ordinarily understood, there is in "The Waste Land" a good deal more than the mere gloomy moods of a New Englander regretting an emotionally undernourished youth. The colonization by the Puritans of New England was merely an incident in that rise of the middle class which has brought a commercial-industrial civilization to the European cities as well as to the American ones. T. S. Eliot now lives in London and has become an English citizen; but the desolation, the æsthetic and spiritual drouth, of Anglo-Saxon middle-class society oppresses London as

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well as Boston. The terrible dreariness of the great modern cities is the atmosphere in which "The Waste Land" takes place—amidst this dreariness, brief, vivid images emerge, brief pure moments of feeling are distilled; but all about us we are aware of nameless millions performing barren office routines, wearing down their souls in interminable labors of which the products never bring them profit—people whose pleasures are so sordid and so feeble that they seem almost sadder than their pains. And this Waste Land has another aspect: it is a place not merely of desolation, but of anarchy and doubt. In our post-War world of shattered institutions, strained nerves and bankrupt ideals, life no longer seems serious or coherent—we have no belief in the things we do and consequently we have no heart for them.

The poet of "The Waste Land" is living half the time in the real world of contemporary London and half the time in the haunted wilderness of the mediæval legend. The water for which he longs in the twilight desert of his dream is to quench the spiritual thirst which torments him in the London dusk; and as Gerontion, "an old man in a dry month," thought of the young men who had fought in the rain, as Prufrock fancied riding the waves with mermaids and lingering in the chambers of the sea, as Mr. Apollinax has been imagined drawing strength from the deep sea-caves of coral islands—so the poet of "The Waste Land," making water the symbol of all freedom, all fecundity and flowering of the soul, invokes in desperate need the memory of an April shower of his

youth, the song of the hermit thrush with its sound of water dripping and the vision of a drowned Phœnician sailor, sunk beyond "the cry of gulls and the deep sea swell," who has at least died by water, not thirst. The poet, who seems now to be travelling in a country cracked by drouth, can only feverishly dream of these things. One's head may be well stored with literature, but the heroic prelude of the Elizabethans has ironic echoes in modern London streets and modern London drawing-rooms: lines remembered from Shakespeare turn to jazz or refer themselves to the sound of phonographs. And now it is one's personal regrets again—the girl in the hyacinth-garden—"the awful daring of a moment's surrender which an age of prudence can never retract"—the key which turned once, and once only, in the prison of inhibition and isolation. Now he stands on the arid plain again, and the dry-rotted world of London seems to be crumbling about him—the poem ends in a medley of quotations from a medley of literatures—like Gérard de Nerval's "Desdichado," the poet is disinherited; like the author of the "Pervigilium Veneris," he laments that his song is mute and asks when the spring will come which will set it free like the swallow's; like Arnaut Daniel, in Dante, as he disappears in the refining fire, he begs the world to raise a prayer for his torment. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins."

"The Waste Land," in method as well as in mood, has left Laforgue far behind. Eliot has developed a new technique, at once laconic, quick, and precise, for representing the transmutations of thought, the interplay of perception

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and reflection. Dealing with subjects complex in the same way as those of Yeats's poem "Among School-Children" and Valéry's "Cimetière Marin," Eliot has found for them a different language. As May Sinclair has said of Eliot, his "trick of cutting his corners and his curves makes him seem obscure when he is clear as daylight. His thoughts move very rapidly and by astounding cuts. They move not by logical stages and majestic roundings of the full literary curve, but as live thoughts move in live brains." Let us examine, as an illustration, the lovely nightingale passage from "The Waste Land." Eliot is describing a room in London:

"Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
'Jug Jug' to dirty ears."

That is, the poet sees, above the mantel, a picture of Philomela changed to a nightingale, and it gives his mind a moment's swift release. The picture is like a window opening upon Milton's earthly paradise—the "sylvan scene," as Eliot explains in a note, is a phrase from "Paradise Lost"—and the poet associates his own plight in the modern city, in which some "infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing," to quote one of Eliot's earlier poems, is somehow being done to death, with Philomela, raped and mutilated by Tereus. But in the earthly paradise, there had been a nightingale singing: Philomela had wept her woes in

song, though the barbarous king had cut out her tongue—her sweet voice had remained inviolable. And with a sudden change of tense, the poet flashes back from the myth to his present situation:

“And still she *cried*, and still the world *pursues*,
‘Jug Jug’ to dirty ears.”

The song of birds was represented in old English popular poetry by such outlandish syllables as “Jug Jug”—so Philomela’s cry sounds to the vulgar. Eliot has here, in seven lines of extraordinary liquidity and beauty, fused the picture, the passage from Milton and the legend from Ovid, into a single moment of vague poignant longing.

“The Waste Land” is dedicated to Ezra Pound, to whom Eliot elsewhere acknowledges a debt; and he has here evidently been influenced by Pound’s “Cantos.” “The Waste Land,” like the “Cantos,” is fragmentary in form and packed with literary quotation and allusion. In fact, the passage just discussed above has a resemblance to a passage on the same subject—the Philomela-Procne myth—at the beginning of Pound’s Fourth Canto. Eliot and Pound have, in fact, founded a school of poetry which depends on literary quotation and reference to an unprecedented degree. Jules Laforgue had sometimes parodied, in his poems, the great lines of other poets——

“O Nature, donne-moi la force et le courage
De me croire en âge” . . .

And Eliot had, in his early poetry, introduced phrases

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from Shakespeare and Blake for purposes of ironic effect. He has always, furthermore, been addicted to prefacing his poems with quotations and echoing passages from other poets. But now, in "The Waste Land," he carries this tendency to what one must suppose its extreme possible limit: here, in a poem of only four hundred and three lines (to which are added, however, seven pages of notes), he manages to include quotations from, allusions to, or imitations of, at least thirty-five different writers (some of them, such as Shakespeare and Dante, laid under contribution several times)—as well as several popular songs; and to introduce passages in six foreign languages, including Sanskrit. And we must also take into consideration that the idea of the literary medley itself seems to have been borrowed from still another writer, Pound. We are always being dismayed, in our general reading, to discover that lines among those which we had believed to represent Eliot's residuum of original invention had been taken over or adapted from other writers (sometimes very unexpected ones: thus, it appears now, from Eliot's essay on Bishop Andrewes, that the first five lines of "The Journey of the Magi," as well as the "word within a word, unable to speak a word" of "Gerontion," had been salvaged from Andrewes's sermons; and the "stiff dishonoured shroud" of "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" seems to be an echo of the "dim dishonoured brow" of Whittier's poem about Daniel Webster). One would be inclined *a priori* to assume that all this load of erudition and literature would be enough to sink any writer, and that such a production

as "The Waste Land" must be a work of second-hand inspiration. And it is true that, in reading Eliot and Pound, we are sometimes visited by uneasy recollections of Ausonius, in the fourth century, composing Greek-and-Latin macaronics and piecing together poetic mosaics out of verses from Virgil. Yet Eliot manages to be most effective precisely—in "The Waste Land"—where he might be expected to be least original—he succeeds in conveying his meaning, in communicating his emotion, in spite of all his learned or mysterious allusions, and whether we understand them or not.

In this respect, there is a curious contrast between Eliot and Ezra Pound. Pound's work *has* been partially sunk by its cargo of erudition, whereas Eliot, in ten years' time, has left upon English poetry a mark more unmistakable than that of any other poet writing English. It is, in fact, probably true at the present time that Eliot is being praised too extravagantly and Pound, though he has deeply influenced a few, on the whole unfairly neglected. I should explain Eliot's greater popularity by the fact that, for all his fragmentary method, he possesses a complete literary personality in a way that Pound, for all his integrity, does not. Ezra Pound, fine poet though he is, does not dominate us like a master imagination—he rather delights us like a miscellaneous collection of admirably chosen works of art. It is true that Pound, in spite of his inveterate translating, is a man of genuine originality—but his heterogeneous shorter poems, and the heterogeneous passages which go to make his longer ones, never seem to come together in a

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whole—as his general prose writing gives scrappy expression to a variety of ideas, a variety of enthusiasms and prejudices, some ridiculous and some valid, some learned and some half-baked, which, though valuable to his generation as polemic, as propaganda and as illuminating casual criticism, do not establish and develop a distinct reasoned point of view as Eliot's prose-writings do. T. S. Eliot has thought persistently and coherently about the relations between the different phases of human experience, and his passion for proportion and order is reflected in his poems. He is, in his way, a complete man, and if it is true, as I believe, that he has accomplished what he has credited Ezra Pound with accomplishing—if he has brought a new personal rhythm into the language—so that he has been able to lend even to the borrowed rhythms, the quoted words, of his great predecessors a new music and a new meaning—it is this intellectual completeness and soundness which has given his rhythm its special prestige.

Another factor which has probably contributed to Eliot's extraordinary success is the essentially dramatic character of his imagination. We may be puzzled by his continual preoccupation with the possibilities of a modern poetic drama—that is to say, of modern drama in verse. Why, we wonder, should he worry about drama in verse—why, after Ibsen, Hauptmann, Shaw and Chekov, should he be dissatisfied with plays in prose? We may put it down to an academic assumption that English drama ended when the blank verse of the Elizabethans ran into the sands, until it occurs to us that Eliot himself is really a dramatic poet.

Mr. Prufrock and Sweeney are characters as none of the personages of Pound, Valéry or Yeats is—they have become a part of our modern mythology. And most of the best of Eliot's poems are based on unexpected dramatic contrasts: "The Waste Land" especially, I am sure, owes a large part of its power to its dramatic quality, which makes it peculiarly effective read aloud. Eliot has even tried his hand at writing a play, and the two episodes from "Wanna Go Home, Baby" which he has published in *The Criterion* seem rather promising. They are written in a sort of jazz dramatic metre which suggests certain scenes of John Howard Lawson's "Processional"; and there can be no question that the future of drama in verse, if it has any future, lies in some such direction. "We cannot reinstate," Eliot has written, "either blank verse or the heroic couplet. The next form of drama will have to be a verse drama, but in new verse forms. Perhaps the conditions of modern life (think how large a part is now played in our sensory life by the internal combustion engine!) have altered our perception of rhythms. At any rate, the recognized forms of speech-verse are not as efficient as they should be; probably a new form will be devised out of colloquial speech."

In any case, that first handful of Eliot's poems, brought out in the middle of the War (1917) and generally read, if at all, at the time, as some sort of modern *vers de société*, was soon found, as Wyndham Lewis has said, to have had the effect of a little musk that scents up a whole room. And as for "The Waste Land," it enchanted and devas-

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tated a whole generation. Attempts have been made to reproduce it—by Aldington, Nancy Cunard, etc.—at least a dozen times. And as Eliot, lately out of Harvard, assumed the rôle of the middle-aged Prufrock and to-day, at forty, in one of his latest poems, "The Song of Simeon," speaks in the character of an old man "with eighty years and no to-morrow"—so "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land" have made the young poets old before their time. In London, as in New York, and in the universities both here and in England, they for a time took to inhabiting exclusively barren beaches, cactus-grown deserts, and dusty attics overrun with rats—the only properties they allowed themselves to work with were a few fragments of old shattered glass or a sparse sprinkling of broken bones. They had purged themselves of Masefield as of Shelley for dry tongues and rheumatic joints. The dry breath of the Waste Land now blighted the most amiable country landscapes; and the sound of jazz, which had formerly seemed jolly, now inspired only horror and despair. But in this case, we may forgive the young for growing prematurely decrepit: where some of even the finest intelligences of the elder generation read "The Waste Land" with blankness or laughter, the young had recognized a poet.

III

As a critic, Eliot occupies to-day a position of distinction and influence equal in importance to his position as a poet. His writings have been comparatively brief and rare—he

has published only four small books of criticism—yet he has probably affected literary opinion, during the period since the War, more profoundly than any other critic writing English. Eliot's prose style has a kind of felicity different from that of his poetic style; it is almost primly precise and sober, yet with a sort of sensitive charm in its austerity—closely reasoned and making its points with the fewest possible words, yet always even, effortless and lucid. In a reaction against the impressionistic criticism which flourished at the end of the century and which has survived into our own time—the sort of criticism which, in dealing with poetry, attempts to reproduce its effect by having recourse to poetic prose—T. S. Eliot has undertaken a kind of scientific study of æsthetic values: avoiding impressionistic rhetoric and *a priori* æsthetic theories alike, he compares works of literature coolly and tries to distinguish between different orders of artistic effects and the different degrees of satisfaction to be derived from them.

And by this method, Eliot has done more than perhaps any other modern critic to effect a revaluation of English literature. We sometimes follow his literary criticism with the same sort of eagerness and excitement with which we follow a philosophical inquiry. Professor Saintsbury has played in literature much the same sort of rôle that he has played as a connoisseur of wines, that of an agreeable and entertaining guide of excellent taste and enormous experience; Edmund Gosse, often intelligent and courageous in dealing with French or Scandinavian writers, could never quite, when it came to English literature, bring himself to

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drop his official character of Librarian of the House of Lords—his attitude was always a little that of the Beef Eater in the Tower of London, who assumes the transcendent value of the Crown Jewels which he has been set to guard and does not presume to form a personal opinion as to their taste or their respective merits; and the moral passion of Paul Elmer More has ended by paralyzing his æsthetic appreciation. But T. S. Eliot, with an infinitely sensitive apparatus for æsthetic appreciation, approaching English literature as an American, with an American's peculiar combination of avidity and detachment and with more than the ordinary English critic's reading in the literatures, ancient and modern, of the Continent, has been able to succeed as few writers have done in the excessively delicate task of estimating English, Irish and American writers in relation to one another, and writers in English in relation to writers on the Continent. The extent of Eliot's influence is amazing: these short essays, sent out without publicity as mere scattered notes on literature, yet sped with so intense a seriousness and weighted with so wide a learning, have not only had the effect of discrediting the academic clichés of the text-books, but are even by way of establishing in the minds of the generation now in college a new set of literary clichés. With the ascendancy of T. S. Eliot, the Elizabethan dramatists have come back into fashion, and the nineteenth-century poets gone out. Milton's poetic reputation has sunk, and Dryden's and Pope's have risen. It is as much as one's life is worth nowadays, among young people, to say an approv-

ing word for Shelley or a dubious one about Donne. And as for the enthusiasm for Dante—to paraphrase the man in Hemingway's novel, there's been nothing like it since the Fratellinis!

Eliot's rôle as a literary critic has been very similar to Valéry's in France: indeed, the ideas of the two men and their ways of stating them have corresponded so closely that one guesses they must influence each other a good deal. Like Valéry, Eliot believes that a work of art is not an oracular outpouring, but an object which has been constructed deliberately with the aim of producing a certain effect. He has brought back to English criticism something of that trenchant rationalism which he admires in the eighteenth century, but with a much more catholic appreciation of different styles and points of view than the eighteenth century allowed. The Romantics, of course, fare badly before this criticism. Vague sentiment vaguely expressed, rhetorical effusion disguising bad art—these Eliot's laconic scorn has nipped. For him, Byron is "a disorderly mind, and an uninteresting one": Keats and Shelley "not nearly such great poets as they are supposed to be"; whereas the powers of Dryden are "wider, but no greater than those of Milton." Just as Valéry lately protested in a lecture that he was unable to understand the well known lines of Alfred de Musset:

"Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux,
Et j'en sais d'immortels qui sont de purs sanglots."

so Eliot, in an essay on Crashaw, has confessed, with a cer-

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tain superciliousness, his inability to understand the following stanza from Shelley's "Skylark":

"Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, who feel that it is there."

"For the first time, perhaps," says Eliot, "in verse of such eminence, sound exists without sense."

It will be seen that Eliot differs from Valéry in believing that poetry should make "sense." And he elsewhere, in his essay on Dante in "The Sacred Wood," remonstrates with Valéry for asserting that philosophy has no place in poetry. Yet Eliot's point of view, though more intelligently reasoned and expressed, comes down finally to the same sort of thing as Valéry's and seems to me open to the same sort of objection. Eliot's conclusion in respect to the relation of philosophy to poetry is that, though philosophy *has* its place in poetry, it is only as something which we "see" among the other things with which the poet presents us, a set of ideas which penetrate his world, as in the case of the "Divina Commedia": in the case of *such* a poet as Lucretius, the philosophy sometimes seems antagonistic to the poetry only because it happens to be a philosophy "not rich enough in feeling . . . incapable of complete expansion into pure vision." Furthermore, "the original form of philosophy cannot be poetic": the poet must use a philosophy already invented by somebody else. Now, though we may admire the justice of Eliot's judg-

ments on the various degrees of artistic success achieved by Dante, Lucretius and others, it becomes plainer and plainer, as time goes on, that the real effect of Eliot's, as of Valéry's, literary criticism, is to impose upon us a conception of poetry as some sort of pure and rare æsthetic essence with no relation to any of the practical human uses for which, for some reason never explained, only the technique of prose is appropriate.

Now this point of view, as I have already suggested in writing about Paul Valéry, seems to me absolutely unhistorical—an impossible attempt to make æsthetic values independent of all the other values. Who will agree with Eliot, for example, that a poet cannot be an original thinker and that it is not possible for a poet to be a completely successful artist and yet persuade us to accept his ideas at the same time? There is a good deal in Dante's morality which he never got out of the Scholastics, as, for all we know, there may be a good deal in Lucretius which he never got out of Epicurus. When we read Lucretius and Dante, we are affected by them just as we are by prose writers of eloquence and imagination—we are compelled to take their opinions seriously. And as soon as we admit that prose writing may be considered on the same basis with verse, it becomes evident that we cannot, in the case of Plato, discriminate so finely as to the capacity of his philosophy for being "expanded into pure vision" that we are able to put our finger on the point where the novelist or poet stops and the scientist or metaphysician begins; nor, with Blake any more than with Nietzsche

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and Emerson, distinguish the poet from the aphorist. The truth is, of course, that, in Lucretius' time, verse was used for all sorts of didactic purposes for which we no longer consider it appropriate—they had agricultural poems, astronomical poems, poems of literary criticism. How can the "Georgics," the "Ars Poetica" and Manilius be dealt with from the point of view of the capacity of their material for being "expanded into pure vision"? To modern readers, the subjects of the "Georgics"—bee-keeping, stock-raising, and so forth—seem unsuitable and sometimes annoying in verse; yet for Virgil's contemporaries, the poem must have been completely successful—as, indeed, granted the subject, it is. Nor does it follow that, because we are coming to use poetry for fewer and fewer literary purposes, our critical taste is becoming more and more refined, so that we are beginning to perceive for the first time the true, pure and exalted function of poetry: that is, simply, as Valéry says, to produce a "state"—as Eliot says, to afford a "superior amusement." It is much more likely that for some reason or other, verse as a technique of literary expression is being abandoned by humanity altogether—perhaps because it is a more primitive, and hence a more barbarous technique than prose. Is it possible to believe, for example, that Eliot's hope of having verse reinstated on the stage—even verse of the new kind which he proposes—is likely ever to be realized?

The tendency to keep verse isolated from prose and to confine it to certain highly specialized functions dates in English at least from the time of Coleridge, when, in

spite of the long narrative poems which were fashionable, verse was already beginning to fall into disuse. Coleridge defined a poem as "that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having *this* object in common with it), it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part." Poe, who had doubtless read Coleridge on the subject, wrote thirty years later that there was no such thing as a long poem, that "no very long poem would ever be popular again," etc. Eliot and Valéry follow Coleridge and Poe in their theory as well as in their verse, and they seem to me to confuse certain questions by talking as if the whole of literature existed simultaneously in a vacuum, as if Homer's and Shakespeare's situations had been the same as Mallarmé's and Laforgue's, as if the latter had been attempting to play the same sort of rôles as the former and could be judged on the same basis. It is inevitable, of course, that we should try to arrive at absolute values through the comparison of the work of different periods—I have just praised Eliot for his success at this—but it seems to me that in this particular matter a good many difficulties would be cleared up if certain literary discussions could be removed from the artificially restricted field of verse—in which it is assumed that nothing is possible or desirable but a quintessential distillation called "poetry," and that that distillation has nothing in common with anything possible to obtain through prose—to

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the field of literature in general. Has not such a great modern novel as "Madame Bovary," for example, at least as much in common with Virgil and Dante as with Balzac and Dickens? Is it not comparable from the point of view of intensity, music and perfection of the parts, with the best verse of any period? And we shall consider Joyce in this connection later.

With all gratitude, therefore, for the salutary effect of Eliot's earlier criticism in curbing the carelessness and gush of the aftermath of Romanticism, it seems plain that the anti-Romantic reaction is leading finally into pedantry and into a futile æstheticism. "Poetry," Eliot wrote in "The Sacred Wood," "is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotion know what it means to want to escape from them." This was valid, and even noble, in 1920 when "The Sacred Wood" was published; but to-day, after ten years of depersonalized and over-intellectualized verse, so much of it written in imitation of Eliot, the same sort of thing in the mouths of Eliot's disciples sounds like an excuse for *not* possessing emotion and personality.

Yet, in spite of the weaknesses of Eliot's position as he has sometimes been driven to state it dogmatically, he has himself largely succeeded in escaping the vices which it seems to encourage. The old nineteenth century criticism of Ruskin, Renan, Taine, Sainte-Beuve, was closely allied to history and novel writing, and was also the vehicle for

all sorts of ideas about the purpose and destiny of human life in general. The criticism of our own day examines literature, art, ideas and specimens of human society in the past with a detached scientific interest or a detached æsthetic appreciation which seems in either case to lead nowhere. A critic like Herbert Read makes dull discriminations between different kinds of literature; a critic like Albert Thibaudet discovers dull resemblances between the ideas of philosophers and poets; a critic like I. A. Richards writes about poetry from the point of view of a scientist studying the psychological reactions of readers; and such a critic as Clive Bell writes about painting so exclusively and cloyingly from the point of view of the varying degrees of pleasure to be derived from the pictures of different painters that we would willingly have Ruskin and all his sermonizing back. And even Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey have this in common with Clive Bell that they seem to feel they have done enough when they have distinguished the kind of pleasure to be derived from one kind of book, the kind of interest to be felt in one kind of personality, from the kind to be found in another. One is supposed to have read everything and enjoyed everything and to understand exactly the reasons for one's enjoyment, but not to enjoy anything excessively nor to raise an issue of one kind of thing against another. Each of the essays of Strachey or Mrs. Woolf, so compact yet so beautifully rounded out, is completely self-contained and does not lead to anything beyond itself; and finally, for all their brilliance, we begin to find them tiresome.

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Now there is a good deal in T. S. Eliot of this pedantry and sterility of his age. He is very much given, for example, to becoming involved in literary Houses-that-Jack-Built: "We find this quality occasionally in Wordsworth," he will write, "but it is a quality which Wordsworth shares with Shenstone rather than with Collins and Gray. And for the right sort of enjoyment of Shenstone, we must read his prose as well as his verse. The 'Essays on Men and Manners' are in the tradition of the great French aphorists of the seventeenth century, and should be read with the full sense of their relation to Vauvenargues, La Rochefoucauld and (with his wider range) La Bruyère. We shall do well to read enough of Theophrastus to understand the kind of effect at which La Bruyère aimed. (Professor Somebody-or-other's book on 'Theophrastus and the Peripatetics' gives us the clew to the intellectual atmosphere in which Theophrastus wrote and enables us to gauge the influences on his work—very different from each other—of Plato and Aristotle.)" At this rate (though I have parodied Eliot), we should have to read the whole of literature in order to appreciate a single book, and Eliot fails to supply us with a reason why we should go to the trouble of doing so. Yet against the background of the criticism of his time, Eliot has stood out unmistakably as a man passionately interested in literature. The real intensity of his enthusiasm makes us forget the primness of his tone; and his occasional dogmatism is redeemed by his ability to see beyond his own ideas, his willingness to admit the relative character of his conclusions.

IV

But if Eliot, in spite of the meagreness of his production, has become for his generation a leader, it is also because his career has been a progress, because he has evidently been on his way somewhere, when many of his contemporaries, more prolific and equally gifted, have been fixed in their hedonism or despair. The poet of "The Waste Land" was too serious to continue with the same complacency as some of his contemporaries inhabiting that godforsaken desert. It was certain he would not stick at that point, and one watched him to see what he would do.

This destination has now, however, become plain. In the preface to the new 1928 edition of "The Sacred Wood," poetry is still regarded as a "superior amusement," but Eliot reports on his part "an expansion or development of interests." Poetry is now perceived to have "something to do with morals, and with religion, and even with politics perhaps, though we cannot say what." In "For Lancelot Andrewes," published in the same year, Eliot declares himself a classicist in literature, an Anglo-Catholic in religion and a royalist in politics, and announces that he has in preparation "three small books" treating of these subjects and to be called respectively "The School of Donne," "The Principles of Modern Heresy," and "The Outline of Royalism." There follows a slender selection of essays, which hint quietly at what may be expected.

We must await the further exposition of Eliot's new

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body of doctrine before it will be possible to discuss it properly. In the meantime, we can only applaud his desire to formulate a consistent central position, at the same time that we may regret the unpromising character of the ideals and institutions which he invokes. One cannot but recognize in Eliot's recent writings a kind of reactionary point of view which had already been becoming fashionable among certain sorts of literary people—a point of view which has much in common with that of the neo-Thomists in France and that of the Humanists in America. "Unless by civilization," writes Eliot, "you mean material progress, cleanliness, etc. . . . if you mean a spiritual co-ordination on a high level, then it is doubtful whether civilization can endure without religion, and religion without a church." Yet you can hardly have an effective church without a cult of Christ as the son of God; and you cannot have such a cult without more willingness to accept the supernatural than most of us to-day are able to muster. We feel in contemporary writers like Eliot a desire to believe in religious revelation, a belief that it would be a good thing to believe, rather than a genuine belief. The faith of the modern convert seems to burn only with a low blue flame. "Our literature," Eliot has himself recently made a character in a dialogue say, "is a substitute for religion, and so is our religion." From such a faith, uninspired by hope, unequipped with zeal or force, what guidance for the future can we expect?

One cannot, however, doubt the reality of the experience to which Eliot testifies in his recent writings—though



it seems to us less an Anglo-Catholic conversion than a reawakening of the New Englander's conscience, of the never quite exorcised conviction of the ineradicable sinfulness of man. Eliot admires Machiavelli because Machiavelli assumes the baseness of human nature as an unalterable fact; and he looks for light to the theologians who offer salvation, not through economic readjustment, political reform, education or biological and psychological study, but solely through "grace." Eliot apparently to-day regards "Evil" as some sort of ultimate reality, which it is impossible either to correct or to analyze. His moral principles seem to me stronger and more authentic than his religious mysticism—and his relation to the Anglo-Catholic Church appears largely artificial. The English seventeenth century divines whose poetry and sermons he admires so much, upon whom he seems so much to depend for nourishment, exist in a richer, a more mysterious, a more heavily saturated atmosphere, in which even monumental outlines are blurred; Eliot himself is stiffer and cooler, more intent, more relentless, more clear. He has his own sort of graciousness, but he seems, as the phrase is, a little thin-lipped. His religious tradition has reached him by way of Boston.

In any case, Eliot's new phase of piety has brought with it a new humility. He apologizes in his 1928 preface for the "assumption of pontifical solemnity" which he now detects in "The Sacred Wood," and his recent little book on Dante (a most admirable introduction) not merely surprises but almost embarrasses us by the modesty with

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which Eliot professes to desire nothing but to be of use to beginners and to tell us of a few of the beautiful things which he has found in the great poet. I will not say that this humility has enfeebled his poetry. The three devout little poems which he has published as Christmas cards since "The Hollow Men" announced the nadir of the phase of sterility and despair given such effective expression in "The Waste Land," seem comparatively uninspired; but the long poem or group of poems, "Ash-Wednesday" (1930), which follows a scheme somewhat similar to that of "The Waste Land," is a not unworthy successor to it.

The poet begins with the confession of his bankruptcy:

"Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign? . . .

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely vans to beat the air
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death."

There follow passages in which the prayer is apparently answered: the poet's contrition and pious resignation are

rewarded by a series of visions which first console then lighten his heart. We find an imagery new for Eliot, a symbolism semi-ecclesiastical and not without a Pre-Raphaelite flavor: white leopards, a Lady gowned in white, junipers and yews, "The Rose" and "The Garden," and jewelled unicorns drawing a gilded hearse: these are varied by an interlude which returns to the imagery and mood of "The Waste Land," and a swirling churning anguished passage which suggests certain things of Gertrude Stein's. At last the themes of the first section recur: the impotent wings of the aged eagle seem to revive, as,

"From the wide window toward the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings.
And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth . . ."

The broken prayer, at once childlike and mystically subtle, with which the poem ends seems to imply that the poet has come closer to the strength and revelation he craves: grace is about to descend.

"Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the
garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood

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Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee."

The literary and conventional imagery upon which "Ash-Wednesday" so largely relies and which is less vivid because more artificial than that of Eliot's earlier poems, seems to me a definite feature of inferiority; the "devil of the stairs" and the "shape twisted on the banister," which are in Eliot's familiar and unmistakable personal vein, somehow come off better than the jewelled unicorn, which incongruously suggests Yeats. And I am made a little tired at hearing Eliot, only in his early forties, present himself as an "aged eagle" who asks why he should make the effort to stretch his wings. Yet "Ash-Wednesday," though less brilliant and intense than Eliot at his very best, is distinguished by most of the qualities which made his other poems remarkable: the exquisite phrasing in which we feel that every word is in its place and that there is not a word too much; the metrical mastery which catches so naturally, yet with so true a modulation, the faltering accents of the suppliant, blending the cadences of the liturgy with those of perplexed brooding thought; and, above all, that "peculiar honesty" in "exhibiting the essen-

